

EMBODYING MODERNITY IN MEXICO: RACE, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE BODY IN  
THE *MESTIZO* STATE

By

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David S. Dalton

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Chairperson, Stuart A. Day

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Luciano Tosta

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Rafael Acosta

---

Nicole Hodges Persley

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Jerry Hoeg

Date Defended: May 11, 2015

The Dissertation Committee for David S. Dalton  
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson Stuart A. Day

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## ABSTRACT

Mexico's traumatic Revolution (1910-1917) attested to stark divisions that had existed in the country for many years. After the dust of the war settled, post-revolutionary leaders embarked on a nation-building project that aimed to assimilate the country's diverse (particularly indigenous) population under the umbrella of official *mestizaje* (or an institutionalized mixed-race identity). Indigenous Mexican would assimilate to the state by undergoing a project of "modernization," which would entail industrial growth through the imposition of a market-based economy. One of the most remarkable aspects of this project of nation-building was the post-revolutionary government's decision to use art to communicate official discourses of *mestizaje*. From the end of the Revolution until at least the 1970s, state officials funded cultural artists whose work buoyed official discourses that posited mixed-race identity as a key component of an authentically Mexican modernity. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that post-revolutionary state and lettered officials viewed the hybridization of indigenous and female bodies with technology as paramount in their attempts to articulate a new national identity. As they fused the body with technology through medicine, education, industrial agriculture and factory work, state officials believed that they could irradicate indigenous "primitivity" and transform Amerindians into full-fledged members of the nascent, *mestizo* state. In the pages that follow, I analyze the work of José Vasconcelos, Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, El Santo, and Carlos Olvera. These artists, and many others, used very different media and produced their works during different decades; however, each artists' work posits the fusion of the body with technology as key to forming an "authentic," Mexican identity. The most remarkable finding of my study is that thinkers with vastly different worldviews concurred with the idea that technology could modernize indigenous bodies and thus aid in their assimilation to the modern, *mestizo* state.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction**..... 1

Notes ..... 43

**Chapter 1** ..... 55

Notes ..... 94

**Chapter 2** ..... 102

Notes ..... 149

**Chapter 3** ..... 157

Notes ..... 202

**Conclusion** ..... 210

Notes ..... 229

**Works Cited**..... 233

## Introduction

### (Re)Constructing the Racialized Body through Technology

Constructs of race in Mexico—as in most parts of the world—are nuanced and at times contradictory. Two almost antithetical experiences I had while living in northern Mexico illustrate this fact. In Monclova, Coahuila I saw a man pick up his clothes from a *lavandería*. Upon finding that a worker had broken the plastic clip on his laundry bag's drawstring, he shouted “¡India bruta!” and left the building. A few months afterwards, some friends in Matehuala, San Luis Potosí invited me to dinner, where a woman said, “Todos somos de una sola raza aquí. No hay racismo como en Estados Unidos.” Her statement caught me off guard because it seemed antithetical to the scene I had witnessed in nearby Coahuila. This led me to question how Mexican discourses could seemingly disapprove of racial discrimination while at the same time marginalizing indigenous peoples and cultures. These—and many other—experiences sparked my academic and intellectual interest in how state officials and the community at large approach the problematic distinction between indigeneity and *mestizaje*. After a great deal of thought, I have realized that these two experiences highlight the slippages and contradictions inherent to discourses of race within the country. Far from merely harboring incompatible opinions, these people's words alluded to the fact that, rather than focus on physical features, Mexican society generally associates a person's racial identity with his or her ties to modernity (Palou 13-15; Lund xv). Throughout this dissertation I look at an array of literary and cultural production that shows that Mexican people become racially and culturally coded as *mestizo* as they assimilate to the modernity-driven state through the use of technology.

Both of my aforementioned experiences reverberate with the ideological constructions of

the *mestizo* state, which Joshua Lund describes as a modernity-driven political entity that enunciates itself through the problematic conflation of mixed-race identity with Western-style modernity (*Mestizo* xv; 20).<sup>1</sup> In both of the episodes I narrated previously, the speakers alluded to the homogenizing effect of technological competency as they implicitly tied *mestizo* identity to modernity. Although she probably would probably not recognize this, the words of the woman who proclaimed a homogenous “raza” fit within a greater imaginary where Amerindians had become *mestizo* through modernization. The existence of sleek tollways, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and internet cafés attested to the nation’s racially hybrid essence. As such, everyone was *mestizo* not due to interracial ancestry, but because the state had overcome indigenous “primitivity.” The angry laundry customer, however, interpreted a worker’s inability to use the relatively simple technology of a laundry bag drawstring as proof that she was a (“backwards”) “*india*.”<sup>2</sup> Far from representing irreconcilable worldviews, these two episodes emphasize the fluidity with which individuals can move between racial categories depending on a given context. Because they occurred in a similar region of the country, these events also problematize the classic view of a racially *mestizo*, urban center and a rural, indigenous periphery (Thomas Benjamin 462), suggesting instead that racial fluidity can also exist within a single geographic space.<sup>3</sup>

As it is tied to technology, *mestizaje* becomes more than an inherited, genetic—or even cultural—construction. Instead, mixed-race identity situates itself at the heart of discourses of modernity. The fact that individuals can attain different racial statuses by moving proficiently through society underscores Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s theory of race formation. These thinkers emphasize “the social nature of race, the absence of any essential racial characteristics, the historical flexibility of racial meanings and categories, [ . . . ] and the irreducible political



aspect of racial dynamics” as proof that race is ultimately a social construction rather than an objective, genetic reality (4).<sup>4</sup> Because Omi and Winant limit their research to the United States, the majority of their work exists outside the scope of this dissertation; however, their recognition of race as a social formation remains useful when discussing racial identity in any Western country. One key to race formation within post-revolutionary Mexico was the tie between miscegenation and modernity, a fact that both buoys and challenges the observation of John L. and Jean Comaroff that one of the principal (albeit flawed) tenets of Western twentieth century thought was that ethnicity—and by extension race—would “wither away with the rise of modernity” (1). On the one hand, *mestizaje* represented the elimination of ethnicity as it resulted from interracial fusion. On the other hand, it became coded as a distinct racial identity and ethnicity that stood in opposition to the indigenous. State officials believed that a prerequisite to modernization was the transformation of Amerindians into *mestizos*—a task the state completed through a process of race formation that used technology to modernize indigenous bodies and initiate them into the *mestizo* state.

Race formation became a key aspect of the post-revolutionary state’s aims to promulgate what Carlos J. Alonso refers to as the “myth of modernity” (19; 19-37). As Lund explains, “the mestizo state resonates materially as a historical-political process of state formation and capitalist penetration that explains itself to itself, indeed sustains itself, by drawing on a discourse of race” (xv).<sup>5</sup> Post-revolutionary ideas of official *mestizaje* built on policies that dated back at least as far as independence and the Republican period (Lund *Mestizo*; Lomnitz, *Labyrinth* 274-77).<sup>6</sup> During the *Porfiriato*, positivistic state *científicos* adopted racial paradigms that built on contemporary, European eugenics. Of course, the Mexican version of these movements rejected those traditions that posited racial miscegenation as essentialistically dysgenic.<sup>7</sup> The intellectual and political

currents of the *Porfiriato* predate my study, but the very existence of these debates shows that discourses of race, science, and the body were already mutually constructing one another, and thus articulating nationalistic ideas of *mexicanidad*—especially *mestizophilia* and modernity—long before the Revolution.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps the greatest difference between Porfirian and post-revolutionary discourses of race was that the “brown” *mestizo* (López Beltrán and García Deister)—rather than the *criollo*/white *mestizo* of the nineteenth century—became “the official protagonist of Mexican history” (Lomnitz, *Labyrinth* 277).<sup>9</sup> Guillermo Bonfil Batalla asserts that even though it reified the indigenous past, this post-revolutionary, official (“brown”) *mestizaje* remained at its core a project of “deindianization” (*Mestizo* 41-42). Even as statist discourses celebrated Mexico’s pre-Columbian ancestry, the mixed-race heroes of the Revolution were specifically coded as not Amerindian. Instead the state emphasized these actors’ ties to European culture and politics because these would legitimize the post-revolutionary government’s focus on *mestizaje*. The exact articulation of official *mestizaje* would change over the years as new political and ideological positions gained popularity (Palou 15), but the concept remains in the background of Mexican thought to this day (Sánchez Prado, *Naciones* 239).<sup>10</sup> In the pages that follow, I look at the juxtaposition of the body with technology in Mexican literary and cultural production beginning with José Vasconcelos’s writings of the early 1920s and ending with the Mexploitation cinema of the 1960s and 1970s. My project shows that lettered officials imagined a means through which the state could incorporate indigenous (and female) Mexicans into the patriarchal order of official *mestizaje* by fusing their “problematic” bodies with technology.

My focus on the body refines—and at times even reimagines—contemporary theories regarding hybridity in Latin America. Néstor García Canclini first used the term “hybridity” to

explain how Latin America existed in, out, and alongside modernity in the 1980s and 1990s. As he states, “the *uncertainty* about the meaning and value of modernity derives not only from what separates nations, ethnic groups, and classes, but also from the sociocultural hybrids in which the traditional and the modern are mixed” (2, emphasis in original). For Canclini, hybridity is a phenomenon that entails the juxtaposition of the “modern” with the folkloric. Given the paradoxical relationship between past and present, he views hybridity as largely deconstructivist, especially as it relates to understandings of Latin American modernity. Despite his work’s popularity, numerous critics have challenged his theory as a binary articulated from the center to define the rural (Rodríguez “Hegemonía y dominio”; Moraña 652). Beyond these observations, we should also note Canclini’s decision to largely ignore the racially (and technologically) hybrid body. The theorist justifies his preference for the term hybridity over *mestizaje* because “it includes diverse intercultural mixtures—not only the racial ones to which *mestizaje* tends to be limited” (11, nt. 1). Although his reasoning is sound, by largely ignoring the hybrid body, and particularly discourses of *mestizaje*, Canclini’s project cannot take into account the fact that many post-revolutionary indigenous discourses were coded as modern due to their commodification within the *mestizo* state (Vaughan and Lewis 5; Comaroff and Comaroff 2-5; 8). Furthermore, Canclini largely fails to consider how *mestizaje* became a racialized understanding of modernity rather than the product of mixed-race parentage. Instead of viewing the “modern” and the “primitive” in binary opposition, then, we should look at how the post-revolutionary state incorporated both into its formation of an authentic, national modernity.

The post-revolutionary state utilized hybridizing discourses to transform its “primitive” sectors into modern participants in society. In this dissertation, I consider at least three “hybridities” that are intimately tied to the body: technological,<sup>11</sup> racial, and cultural. Although

not exactly a hybridity—at least within the texts and cultural production that I examine here—another key construct that interfaces directly with the aforementioned hybridities is that of gender.<sup>12</sup> As hybridized bodies appear in Mexican cultural production, they almost always dialogue with the reigning articulations of both official and unofficial *mestizaje*. My work differs from previous scholarship because it shows how racially, culturally, and especially technologically hybridized bodies are by necessity coded as modern (and thus *mestizo*) in the Mexican context.<sup>13</sup> What is more, I show that different types of hybridity are frequently conflated with one another. The indigenous body's technological hybridity—which the state often achieved through vaccinations, rural hygiene, industrial agriculture, and factory work—altered its racial identity. As Amerindian people and bodies were fused with technology, they became marked with modernity and thus racial and cultural hybridity. By considering how these multiple hybridities interact and articulate themselves across Mexican cultural production, we can more fully engage the problematic binaries of hybrid/subaltern that Canclini establishes in his own study. In many cases authors and cultural producers represent technologically hybrid subjects to construct, amplify, and/or impose preferred racial and gender identities from the center to the periphery. Given the relationship between modernity and hybridity, it should come as no surprise that post-revolutionary representations of the hybrid body almost always appear as future-oriented ideals toward which the nation should aspire. Corporeal hybridity and modernity become the founding elements of a distinctly Mexican society that is technologically advanced, racially and culturally mixed, and clearly gendered.

Within post-revolutionary Mexico, *mestizaje* represented the discursive tool that could overcome perceived indigenous shortcomings and initiate Mexico into the modern world. I distance my theorizations of hybridity from those of a body of scholars who, according to Serge

Gruzinski, argue “that hybrids make it possible to break free from modernity, condemned for being too Western and one-dimensional” (18).<sup>14</sup> The official *mestizaje* of the post-revolutionary state ultimately attempted to achieve modernity by imposing a single acceptable articulation of a homogenizing racial hybridity on the masses. Ana María Alonso explains the paradoxical nature of this construct when she posits *mestizaje* as “the only way to create homogeneity out of heterogeneity, unity out of fragmentation, a strong nation that could withstand the internal menace of its own failures to overcome the injustices of its colonial past and the external menace of US imperialism” (462). Far from merely existing as a means for reconciling the nation’s indigenous past with its goals of industrialization along a European model, official *mestizaje* also provided a means by which the state could resist US and European attempts to meddle in the nation’s internal affairs. By affirming its mixed-race identity, Mexican leaders rejected discourses of white supremacy that abounded throughout North America and northern Europe and instead asserted their own country’s economic and genetic potential (Stepan 8; Sánchez Prado, “Mestizaje” 390-91). In this way, *mestizaje* was a highly resistant construction that recognized a degree of potential in indigenous people that other Western nations denied.

Despite its ostensible inclusiveness, the post-revolutionary state’s resistant *mestizaje* ironically established its own projects of what Claudio Lomnitz calls “internal colonialism” (*Deep* 140). As he observes, the country’s reigning paradigms of pro-miscegenation eugenics facilitated its imperial projects:

Eugenics offered a way to objectify and quantify differences between poor Mexicans and ideal norms represented by the elite. This in turn permitted the state’s development mission to be defined, while the poor national majority could remain scientifically devalued. At the same time, the potential uses of race science

to undercut the imagined potential of Mexico's "halfbreed" race is well known and was always a potential liability for nationalists. (*Deep Mexico* 140)

State-sanctioned anti-imperialism, then, necessarily entailed the domestication of the Amerindian. All of my chapters discuss the internal imperialism of official *mestizaje* alongside problematic attempts to resist foreign incursions in the country. The different artists that I analyze balance both ends of this imperial equation differently, but viewed alongside one another, it becomes clear that state officials saw no moral contradiction between their resistance to foreign imperialism and their own projects of internal empire; instead, they viewed both of these endeavors as necessary to articulating a modern, *mestizo* nation-state.

This fact refines the thought of mid-century Latin American thinkers like Roberto Fernández Retamar, who asserted that an enlightened Latin America would not turn toward imperialism (46-55). As my project shows, notions of empire sat at the heart of Latin American and Mexican notions of modernity. This should not come as a surprise even for the student of Retamar; by viewing the region as a slave of the imperializing nations (30; 12-36), the thinker implicitly suggested that Latin America's colonial experience had resulted in a Hegelian master/slave relationship where the region's means of self representation must come through and be patterned after its (imperial) oppressor(s) (Hegel 186-95)—both Spain and later the United States. As the nation's elites followed the imperial model, they would of necessity establish internal empires that mirrored those of their own historical colonizers, a phenomenon that I discuss in especially deep detail in Chapter 3. Silviano Santiago states that in (particularly Brazilian) *mestizaje*, "cultural imperialism desires a response of silence, or, once again, that of the emphatic echo serving to strengthen the conqueror's power" (8).<sup>15</sup> Post-revolutionary *mestizo* normativity found itself at an awkward juncture; racial hybridity enjoyed hegemony within its

own national space, but global hierarchies of power treated it as nothing more than a distant “echo” of the European. As mixed-race peoples attempted to validate themselves within these Eurocentric constructs of power, they necessarily devalued the indigenous component of their racial and cultural heritage. Viewed in this light, statist articulations of post-revolutionary official *mestizaje* were highly alienating. The very concept of *mestizo* modernity revolved around a desire to emulate a historical conqueror who still refused to recognize the value of mixed-race bodies and societies. As the state sponsored official articulations of *mestizaje*, it further validated and institutionalized the racial and gender divisions that had existed since the earliest days of the conquest. Furthermore, by basing modernity on a historical construct that subjugated both Amerindians and women, the post-revolutionary state explicitly favored Europe over the indigenous, the masculine over the feminine.

### **Lettered Biopolitics in the Post-Revolutionary State**

The close of the Revolution serves as an appropriate point of departure for my study because, as Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado notes, “El Estado mexicano en su versión actual tiene una fecha de nacimiento precisa: cinco de febrero de 1917. En ese día, se promulgó la Constitución de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos” (*Naciones* 15). It was also at this moment in the nation’s history that, according to Thomas B. Irving, the masses began to “assume social and political power” (ix). As a new demographic took political consciousness, government leaders attempted to engage the indigenous majority and transform it into a mixed-race entity. They did this primarily through nation-building initiatives that aimed to “modernize” the (indigenous) masses by initiating them into the technologically advanced world as newly *mestizo* workers (Taylor and Yúdice 26). One facet of these post-revolutionary projects was their aim to literally change the

racial identities—and by extension political interests—of the “masses.” Regarding this practice, Bonfil Batalla states, “It is a curious democracy that does not recognize the existence of the people themselves, but, rather sets itself the task of creating them” (“Problem” 31).<sup>16</sup> As Bartra notes, in order to consolidate power, the post-revolutionary state had to “construir un mito [. . .] sobre el hombre inmerso en el torbellino histórico desencadenado por la Revolución” (*Jaula*). This myth was, of course, one of *mexicanidad* and *mestizophilia*—or several loosely-related discourses that posited modernity, mixed-race identity, and heteronormativity as the key building blocks of modern Mexican greatness.<sup>17</sup> In the end, the newly democratic state found itself at a crossroads in which past constructions of national identity could no longer apply. A new mythos would have to emerge and allow, promote, and even coerce indigenous assimilation into the capitalistic and industrialized state. This new form of racial hybridity resulted as much from the modernization of indigenous people as it did from actual interracial reproduction. As a result, the juxtaposition of the formerly indigenous body with technology became key to official *mestizaje*.

Because the state would have to inculcate *mestizo* values in the public at large if it wished to bring about the changes it desired, it commissioned numerous *letrados* whose literature and art would instill a *mestizo* mindset in the masses.<sup>18</sup> Ángel Rama describes the *letrado*, or man of letters, as a (generally European/*criollo* male) writer who uses his privileged position as an intellectual to contribute to Latin American politics (17). As the critic discusses the *letrados*’ birth during colonial times he argues that “para cumplir su misión civilizadora [. . .] fue también indispensable que ese grupo estuviera imbuido de la conciencia de ejercer un alto ministerio que lo equiparaba a una clase sacerdotal” (31). Thus the *letrado* became a secular priest and civilizing actor who used his elite knowledge of letters to domesticate the city. Because all civilizing missions require the domination of the “uncivilized” and “barbaric” elements of



society, the *letrado* is ultimately a highly polemical figure whose very existence suggests that a “subhuman” threat to society lurks outside of his orderly world. One key aspect of Rama’s book is the recognition that “barbaric” threats to order would emerge from very different sources over the years, which meant that these writer/politicians had to constantly reinvent themselves; indeed, each of his chapters discusses how articulations of lettered discourses changed over the years. This was most certainly the case in post-revolutionary Mexico, where, rather than limit their discussions to the Porfirian oligarchy, *letrado* figures suddenly had to engage the population at large.<sup>19</sup> As a result, these twentieth century *letrados* expanded their focus beyond urban centers like Mexico City and directed their energies toward establishing order in rural areas as well. The changing intellectual and political conditions within the country fostered a new articulation of the *letrado* that differed greatly from its predecessors.

One of the principal goals of the early and mid twentieth century Mexican state was to establish order following the chaos of the war that had finally ended. Because much of the pre-revolutionary discontent had resulted from systemic racism (Quijano 557), this by definition entailed repercussions regarding race and modernity. Not surprisingly, lettered discourses largely aimed to define the means by which indigenous Mexicans could modernize themselves and assimilate to the *mestizo* state. Beyond simply theorizing these problems intellectually, these new *letrados* also had to engage indigenous Mexicans and convince them to adopt *mestizo* values. This change in audience forced lettered figures to search for innovative ways to communicate their ideas. Unlike the *letrados* of previous generations, who—at least according to Rama—depended almost exclusively on the written word, post-revolutionary *letrados* used recent technological advancements to employ discourses through media like film, radio, theatre, and art.<sup>20</sup> This change in media allowed political artists to reach a much larger audience than their

forbears as it became possible to engage even the illiterate with racially charged representations of Mexican nationalism.

One fascinating aspect of the lettered discourses that appeared throughout the post-revolutionary period was that many thinkers championed the technological hybridization of the indigenous body as the best means through which lettered and government actors could initiate the Amerindian into the modern, *mestizo* state. As the invocation of technological hybridity aimed to incorporate potential indigenous laborers into the workforce, it was in some senses highly inclusive. Certainly, the goal was not to eliminate Amerindian people per se, but rather help them articulate themselves in a way that benefitted the state. Far from attempting to create an intercultural communion, the state aimed to culturally and genetically homogenize its population by imposing official norms of racial and technological *mestizaje* from the center to the periphery. The state primarily carried out these projects of assimilation in rural Mexico through the *misiones culturales*, which were state-sanctioned education programs that began under the tutelage of José Vasconcelos. As their very name suggests, the state imbued these initiatives with a redemptive glow.<sup>21</sup> Many scholars have asserted that one key component of the *misiones culturales* and similar programs was the desire to eliminate indigenous cultures even as indigenous bodies continued to contribute to the national economy (Lewis 178-82; Pla Brugat; Taylor and Yúdice 311). As lettered discourses defined and taught the ways in which the Amerindian could assimilate to modernity, they played an essential role in a post-revolutionary project that fetishized progress and mixed-race identity.

Lettered prestige thrived during the first half of the twentieth century, where these figures handled the literary and artistic representations of state-sponsored ideals of *mestizaje* and later *indigenismo*.<sup>22</sup> The exact articulation of official discourses of *mestizaje* constantly shifted in the

years following the Revolution, and lettered representations of this racial construct had to evolve to reflect those changes (Palou 15). Nevertheless, writers and cultural producers maintained their positions of influence in national politics during these years. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the ruling Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR) focused primarily on consolidating power (Bruno-Jofre and Martínez Valle 47-49; Gillingham 176). In 1946, under Miguel Alemán, the party was renamed the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). This rechristening of the party coincided with a shift in focus; from this point forward, the state's primary aim was industrialization and the full-scale institutionalization of the Revolution (Gillingham 177).<sup>23</sup> *Mestizaje*—both biological and cultural—remained at the heart of state discourses in both epochs, but its articulation would of necessity evolve.<sup>24</sup> As a result, lettered figures had to develop new ways to imagine, represent, and communicate racial identity to and for the masses. The 1920s *hispanista*<sup>25</sup> literature of José Vasconcelos—which I discuss in further detail in Chapter 1—imagines technology as a means by which the state can exercise power and forcefully impose its eugenic worldview of racial *mestizaje* and European cultural norms on the masses. In contrast, Emilio “El Indio” Fernández’s *indigenista* cinema, which forms the basis of Chapter 2, sees technological hybridity as a way for indigenous people who fail to uphold state-sanctioned norms of racial and gender performativity to assimilate to modernity. Within his thought, the people can—and should—maintain their pre-Columbian cultural heritage even as they adopt the *mestizo* values of the fully institutionalized Revolution.<sup>26</sup>

Most criticism has followed the lead of Octavio Paz (248-53) in asserting that the prestige of official and lettered discourses fell dramatically following the massacre of Tlatelolco on October 2, 1968 (Franco, *Decline and Fall* 195-99; Avelar 12-13). As the story goes, this and other events from the decade showed the post-revolutionary state's oppressive nature, and

official discourses that praised the “Milagro mexicano”—a forty year period following the Revolution in which the nation showed impressive industrial growth (Carmona et. al 19)—lost credibility (Paz 252). Furthermore, they assert that, beyond sounding the death knell of the nation’s lettered city, 1968 marked the end of official *mestizaje* as a discourse. There is some truth to this overriding narrative; it was in these years that broadly educated intellectuals ceded their privileged position within the government to specially-trained technocrats.<sup>27</sup> In some ways, these new power holders showed an even greater commitment than their *letrado* forbears to positing mixed-race—or, perhaps more precisely, non-indigenous—identity as the “authentic” articulation of *mexicanidad*. Dolores Pla Burgat demonstrates this fact when she notes that the post-revolutionary government used linguistic and cultural indicators—and even self-identification—to identify citizens as Amerindian until the 1960s. Upon taking power in the 1970s, state technocrats changed the self-identification policies and chose to count only those people who spoke indigenous languages as anything other than *mestizo*. By doing this, the state drastically lowered the official count of Amerindians living within its borders despite the fact that demographics had probably changed very little (“Más desinidación”). Beyond the rise of technocratic political leaders, the second key component to the purported fall of the lettered city was the marginalization of the Mexican writer. Writers and cultural producers continued to challenge and buoy different aspects of *mestizo* normativity, but they now generally did so independently from the state.<sup>28</sup>

As the time has passed, a new generation of scholars has returned to the 1960s with fresh perspectives. Pedro Palou challenges the idea that official discourses of *mestizaje* lost traction in 1968 when he asserts that state (and perhaps lettered) officials continued to appeal to racial hybridity as a strategy for taming problematic bodies and effecting economic and cultural

modernity until 1984, “cuando colapsa el modelo de modernización capitalista sustentado por el Proyecto mestizófilo y fracasa la idea del Estado nutricional” (27).<sup>29</sup> My own study parallels that of Palou as it shows that state-sponsored lettered discourses championed certain articulations of *mestizaje* well into the 1970s (and even into the early 1980s) in the form of Mexploitation cinema. Chapter 3 discusses the 1960s and 1970s as a time of political and intellectual turmoil where literature, particularly the youth countercultural *onda* movement, began to break away from the lettered ideals of previous generations. This forced the state to reinvent the *letrado* by moving him solely to the genre of film. Unlike previous decades that employed high quality melodramas, the state now communicated *mexicanidad* through Mexploitation cinema, which consisted of B-movies. One of the most fascinating aspects of both *la onda* and Mexploitation is that, despite their ideological differences, these movements placed a heavy emphasis on emerging technologies and their relationship to the national body. This very fact shows how the technologized body existed beyond any single worldview and instead became a trope through which writers, artists, and consumers of different forms of cultural production could imagine the country’s racial identity and its ties to modernity.

Lettered attempts to assimilate the indigenous population through racial and technological hybridity ultimately reflected the desire to assert Mexico’s place—politically, racially, and technologically—alongside, or even beyond, that of the United States and Western Europe.<sup>30</sup> According to Agustín F. Basave Benítez, official *mestizaje* held that “los que poseen un linaje mixto hispano-indígena, son los mexicanos por antonomasia, los auténticos depositarios de la mexicanidad” (13). Viewed in this light, projects of assimilation reverberated with the fascist discourses of the day.<sup>31</sup> As the state adopted *indigenista* policies that aimed to incorporate indigenous populations into *mestizo* modernity, they also reified a right-wing understanding of

an essentialist Mexico whose superior soul differentiated it from Europe and North America (Lomnitz, *Labyrinth* 278).<sup>32</sup> As a working definition of (Mexican) fascism, Jorge Isauro Rionda Ramírez states, “al respecto del fascismo éste se da precisamente cuando algunos suprimen los derechos de los demás para imponer sus intereses. Puede darse por un grupo empresarial, político, clase social, o intereses coludidos de varios. Se suprime no solo la democracia, sino el derecho en sí” (1097). One key way in which fascism played out in Mexico was through the corporatist policies—particularly the division of peasants, workers, and the military into specific sectors within the bureaucracy (Lomnitz; *Labyrinth* 278)<sup>33</sup>—that permeated PRI and PNR administrations (Rionda Ramírez 1095). National leaders further cemented their ties to fascism as they patterned official discourses—particularly film—after fascist countries like Italy (Mexico, *Ideas generales* 1-2). The state’s principal aim was not to disseminate pro-fascist or Nazi discourses per se, but rather to use various media to instill mass nationalism (Thomas Benjamin 479).<sup>34</sup> In the end, the fascist tendencies of the post-revolutionary state were mostly economic and identitary in nature. Thus lettered enunciations of *mestizo* nationalism had a deep effect on identitarian discourses throughout the country.

Nationalism, *mestizaje*, and modernity became key ingredients to officialist discourses of *mexicanidad*, and representations of technological hybridity came from *letrados* of all political persuasions. As Basave Benítez observes, “pensadores de los más disímiles tendencias coinciden—y en algunos casos es de hecho su único común denominador—en la mestizofilia. Y cuando desde tan diversos puntos de partida se arriba al mismo punto de llegada es imposible desechar la idea de que antes de emprender el camino se tiene una meta preconcebida” (141).<sup>35</sup> Obviously, this ultimate goal was a nationalistic, yet European-style modernity. Despite its clear points of contact with fascist discourses, representations of racial and technological hybridity as

a means of modernizing the Amerindian body were hardly limited to the right. Communist muralists like Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros depicted technologically hybrid bodies in their *indigenista* art to represent the glorious (*mestizo*) future of Mexico's downtrodden indigenous race.<sup>36</sup> Along with *mestizophilia*, the modernizing potential of technology on the body seems to be one of the few beliefs that several otherwise ideologically opposed post-revolutionary thinkers had in common. Regardless of a particular post-revolutionary intellectual's politics, his (or her) juxtaposition of the body with technology was almost always depicted in a triumphant, nationalistic manner. People like José Vasconcelos aimed to ultimately erase indigenous Mexico through technology-aided racial miscegenation, while Rivera's paternalistic discourses exalted the native spirit. In both cases, state actors undertook projects of cultural nationalism—or a series of artistic discourses that ultimately advocated official *mestizaje*—whose principal goal was to assimilate “primitive” Mexicans into modern society (Swarthout 66-78). Beyond frequently juxtaposing indigenous bodies with technology, these discourses also asserted a biopolitical division between Amerindian and *mestizo* articulations of humanity.

The state distanced itself from its revolutionary values as it adopted biopolitical frameworks that barred indigenous people from popular citizenship (Quijano 564, 568).<sup>37</sup> Yet this practice ironically placed the country alongside the modern, Western democracies that it hoped to emulate. Michel Foucault traces the emergence of biopolitics to the 19th century, when state power became associated with the ability to preserve—rather than take—human life (“Birth” 202-07). Beyond its air of apparent benevolence, the biopolitical state has an oppressive underbelly; in their defense of life, state officials almost always favor one segment of the population over another. Lomnitz's work on colonial Mexico suggests that biopolitical

discourses of power predated the nineteenth century because the Spanish asserted control over life and death in colonial Mexico (*Death* 80-96). He also notes that the Crown's "power over life [. . .] was too rudimentary to avoid the uncontrollable wave of violence that was Mexico's sixteenth century" (*Death* 81), a fact that signals this administration more precisely as proto-biopolitical. Given Mexico's colonial heritage, it should come as no surprise that the state would justify the traumatic process of modernization in biopolitical terms by asserting that this process would improve the national quality of life. Yet because one of its principal tenets was the assimilation of indigenous people to *mestizo* culture, modernization could never represent a universal good. Within this discursive framework, the indigenous population necessarily remained on the periphery. Thus the biopolitical drive for a quantifiably better life justified the state-sponsored cultural genocide of the nation's Amerindians. The state never (officially) condoned the murder of indigenous Mexicans, but it did ambitiously strive to eradicate their culture—and, as we will soon see, even their genome—by "educating" them out of their supposed racial and/or racialized shortcomings. As they engaged the indigenous population, lettered discourses attempted to turn industrialization and modernization into universal goods by transforming indigenous Mexicans into modern participants in official *mestizaje*.

The perceived need to modernize in spite of the interests of the sizable Amerindian population produced what Giorgio Agamben refers to as a "state of exception" (*State of Exception* 1-31). As Agamben notes, despite an obsession with preserving human life, biopolitical states constantly assert their right to justifiably kill. The theorist reconciles these contradictory goals within the biopolitical state by complicating the self-evident nature of human life. Reaching back to ancient Greece, he finds two words, *bios* and *zoê*, both of which become "life" when translated into Italian or English (*Homo Sacer* 9-14). However, only *bios* denotes



human life; *zoê*, which forms the root of zoology, refers to a lower, animal life. When a state of exception arises, those in power interpellate certain segments of society into *zoê* status, thus stripping them of their rights and producing a *Homo Sacer*, or a subject who leads a “bare”—rather than full—life (*Homo Sacer* 80-83). Such individuals “*may be killed and yet not sacrificed*” (*Homo Sacer* 12, emphasis in original), a fact that places their worth alongside livestock meant for slaughter. The *mestizo* state certainly represents a very different context from the Nazi concentration camp that sits at the heart of Agamben’s theorizations, but these contexts share many commonalities, particularly the existence of an institutionalized state of exception—modernization in the case of post-revolutionary Mexico. Not only did state officials produce racialized hierarchies of power, but they also aimed to eliminate contemporary indigenous cultures—outside of the folkloric traditions that drew foreign tourists and capital—and incorporate them into the industrial urban centers. Viewed in this light, the engine for *mestizo* Mexico’s modernity was the result of a system of racialized biopolitics that devalued indigenous life and attempted to coerce it to transform itself into a national (*metizo*) proletariat.

The state’s devaluation of indigeneity produced serious identitary problems not only for the nation’s Amerindians, but for its *mestizos* as well. Rick A. López notes the contradictory nature of devaluing the nation’s indigenous even as it asserted a glorious *mestizaje* when he states that “the worthiness of the European side of this equation [official *mestizaje*] seemed self-evident. But the indigenous side still needed validation” (36). In order to justify the marginalization of contemporary Amerindians without undermining the value of the *mestizo* “majority” that it hoped to foment, state-sponsored *letrados*—particularly muralists like Rivera and film producers like “El Indio”—produced discourses that reified the pre-Columbian past. In this way, these *letrados* signalled the extinct Aztec and Mayan empires as a lost *bios*, while at

the same time relegating contemporary indigenous communities into *zoê*.<sup>38</sup> In this vein of thought, *mestizo* Mexicans became the official heirs of pre-Columbian greatness. This discourse would persist for many years, and in some ways it remains to the present day. Of course, societies that value *mestizaje* must invent strategies that allow individuals to assimilate to the state through means that go beyond interracial reproduction. It was for this reason that so many thinkers favored different incarnations of technological hybridity as a form of achieving *mestizaje*.

### **Eugenics, Cyborgs, and *Mestizo* Modernity**

In lettered Mexican discourses, the juxtaposition and fusion of the body with technology literally changes the way that society racially codes that individual. Many post-revolutionary *letrados* from various ideological positions asserted the lack of—and resistance to—technological hybridity and modernity as a defining element to indigenous “primitivity.” Alfonso Caso, for example, placed four characteristics of indigeneity: language, culture, somatic features, and “conciencia de grupo,” in direct tension with those of (official) *mestizaje* (245). Caso certainly did not think that any one of these aforementioned features necessarily indicated Indianness; instead, he recognized that both indigeneity and *mestizaje* were in constant flux (240-41). When viewed in their totality, however, these elements indicated indigenousness. The anthropologist Manuel Gamio took a more “scientific” approach to the question of indigenous Mexico. For him, the indigenous people of the Americas had been destined for a great cultural heritage on par with that of the Chinese, but the bloody Iberian conquest had destroyed that potential while it existed in embryonic form (*Forjando* 3-4). He differed from European scientific racism in that he generally asserted indigenous equality to whites, but he concurred

with that intellectual current as he asserted that, in its present form, Amerindian culture lacked the scientific and philosophical grandeur of Western society. As such, indigenous Mexico was in dire need of “redemption” (*Forjando* 31-37), and this would come as its people adopted mixed-race cultural norms, which entailed education, a “proper” diet, and the eradication of poverty (Brading 79). As his redemptive projects demonstrate, although Gamio opposed European sciences that attributed genetic inferiority to the Amerindian, he, too, traced these people’s “backwardness” to conditions of the body.

Gamio’s cultural and intellectual approach prescribed an approved method to overcome the perceived shortcomings of the indigenous body by merging it with modern technology. Indeed, although he and Caso disagreed in many ways, both coincided in their belief that the state could “cure” indigenous peoples and bodies of their primitivity by fusing them with modern technologies. Susan Antebi argues that, because “racial difference [. . .] operate[d] as a mode of disability” within post-revolutionary thought, programs to physically change the Amerindian body had eugenic overtones, particularly as they aimed to “eradicate racial characteristics and disabilities” (164).<sup>39</sup> Discourses of indigenous disabledness grew out of post-revolutionary attitudes that viewed native identities as antithetical to modernization, which led the state to systematically withhold privilege from those who chose to identify with Amerindian cultures and worldviews. These racialized constructions of power led the state to conflate vices like alcoholism, decadence, and immorality with indigenous identity, which, along with the work of Caso and others like him, further cemented conflations of indigenous identity with disability (Antebi 165; Pierce). Given that the most “disabling” aspect of indigenous identity was its ties to primitivity, it should come as no surprise that *indigenista* projects attempted to overcome so-called Amerindian backwardness by modernizing indigenous bodies through eugenics and

technology (Suárez y López Guazo, *Eugenesia* 95-107).

This was particularly visible in the cases of education and hygiene, two projects that took on a eugenic nature in Mexico due to the prevalence of Lamarckian genetics, which held that physical changes to the body modified “the organic structure of living things” (Chevalier de Lamarck 182; 182-220). Lamarckism differed from Mendellianism—the genetic paradigm of choice within the US and northern Europe—which rigidly separated distinctions of genotype and learned behavior (Stepan 22-32).<sup>40</sup> These competing paradigms deeply affected how state officials in both parts of the world conceived and implemented eugenic projects. Eugenics ultimately refers to attempts to control human heredity by ensuring that only “desirable” genes remain within the population. The focus on reproduction inherent to Mendellianism led North American and northern European countries to sterilize “dysgenic” bodies in order to purge their genes from the public at large (Paul 1-4). Post-revolutionary Mexican eugenicists fetishized *mestizaje*, and their adoption of Lamarckian paradigms suggested that they could transform Amerindians into *mestizos* by physically altering their bodies (Johnston 5-18; Atenbi 166-67; Stepan 15). Indeed, hygiene projects could genetically alter primitive bodies and transform them into eugenic progenitors (Suárez y López Guazo, “Evolucionismo” 25).<sup>41</sup> As these newly “improved” people reproduced, their offspring would inherit the learned and physical changes that their parents had undergone. Lamarckism greatly informed Mexican and Latin American eugenics “well into the 1940s” (Stepan 65), and, as Chapter 2 shows, this paradigm continued to play a discursive role in films like Emilio Fernández’s *The Torch*, which came out as late as 1950. Lamarckian thought proved especially useful in Latin American countries like Mexico where ties to *mestizaje* signaled the country as irredeemably dysgenic in European circles (Stepan 18). As the state modernized Amerindian people, it not only “redeemed” those whose

bodies it changed, but it also improved their genotype, thus ensuring a racially “desirable” progeny.

Mexico’s distinct approach to genetics resulted in a phenomenon in which state eugenicists focused primarily on “improving” present-day Amerindians, even as they kept an eye toward the future generations whose genotype they were improving (Atenbi 165). Gamio alludes to the futurity of Mexican eugenics when he states:

Debe tenerse en cuenta que el mestizaje conviene a México no sólo desde el punto de vista étnico, sino principalmente para poder establecer un tipo de cultura más avanzado que el poco satisfactorio que hoy presenta la mayoría de la población, y si bien esto puede conseguirse valiéndose de la educación y otros medios, esta tarea se consumará más pronto si se intensifica el mestizaje, pues éste traerá consigo automáticamente un efectivo progreso cultural, como resultado de la eliminación o substitución de las características retrasadas de tipo indígena.

(*Hacia* 27)

The anthropologist’s words embody Kelley R. Swarthout’s observation that the assimilation of indigenous Mexico represented a “patriotic act” (15). Of course, the patriotism that Swarthout refers to was explicitly *mestizo* in nature, and it hoped to redeem “primitive” cultures by assimilating them to the modernized state. This strategy implicitly favored European over native cultures even as it invoked eugenic paradigms that differed with those articulated in (particularly northern) Europe.<sup>42</sup> By focusing their eugenic efforts on educating and changing—rather than sterilizing—indigenous bodies, Mexican eugenicists could literally transform Amerindians into *mestizos*, a potentiality that I discuss in particular depth in Chapter 2.

Even within the framework of Lamarckism, the simple act of sharing technology with the

indigenous population was not enough. State projects had to devote a great deal of time and energy to making sure that these advancements did not fall on deaf ears. The philosopher and aesthetic theorist Samuel Ramos noted this fact when he stated:

Men who in Mexico have tried to solve the problem of civilizing the Indians have believed it possible to adapt them to modern technology, with the idea that it is universal and that any man in possession of his rational faculties can utilize it. They fail to see that to *understand* modern technology is not sufficient reason for adopting it; that it is essential, also, to have the same spirit as that of the men who created it. (119-20, emphasis in original)

Here Ramos refers specifically to failed attempts to take technology, particularly in the form of modern agriculture (Michaels 232), to rural areas. As he signals, the state could not modernize indigenous Mexico without instilling a national (*mestizo*) character, and this would come about through an education consisting of lettered representations that glorified mixed-race modernity. Luis Villoro posited art in its myriad forms as necessary for redeeming the indigenous spirit when he said, “En la pintura, en la poesía o en el ensayo, lo indígena podrá revivirse como elemento del propio espíritu creador del mestizo” (222).<sup>43</sup> Villoro’s observation that the state would turn to art in its attempts to redeem (read: incorporate) indigenous Mexico is correct. However, because a key facet of indigenous redemption entailed the acceptance of technology and assimilation to the modern state, discourses of science and technology remained key to “curing” the “disability” of indigeneity.

Beyond employing post-revolutionary art and proclaiming the value of processes like irrigation, state actors would have to inscribe technology upon indigenous and female bodies. Juxtapositions of the body with technology occurred both in the *misiones culturales* with their

focus on education and hygiene (Aréchiga Córdova “Dictadura”), and through artistic representations of *mexicanidad*. As they asserted the modernizing potential of the technologized body, both art and state hygiene projects synergetically reinforced one another. Physical changes to the body took on a cultural—and, as I show in Chapter 1, even spiritual—dimension as they reframed the indigenous experience. Because technologically hybrid Amerindians became *mestizos* in a Lamarckian sense, they represented the means by which the state could “redeem” indigenous Mexico. Once these changes to the physical body had occurred, technologically enhanced people and their offspring would be ready to undertake the modern activities of industrial agriculture and factory work.

These official projects to reconfigure indigenous racial identity through technology relate to theories that Donna Haraway would enunciate a half-century later when she asserted that cyborg identities had a strong bearing on performative traits like race, gender, and social class (157). Cyborg imagery is especially visible if we follow the lead of Chris Hables Gray, who rather expansively defines the term as any (generally human) body that “has been technologically modified in any significant way, from an implanted pacemaker to a vaccination that reprogrammed [its] immune system” (*Cyborg Citizen* 2). Andy Clark furthers Gray’s arguments when he asserts that all humans are “natural born cyborgs” due to the ever-expanding interaction between humanity and technology (*Natural Born* 3).<sup>44</sup> Obvious problems arise with such all-encompassing definitions; if everyone is already a cyborg, then the figure loses much of its appeal in questioning (post)human being.<sup>45</sup> That said, these more inclusive definitions of cyborg identity are especially useful in untangling the intimate relationships between race, gender, technology, and the body in post-revolutionary Mexico. As we understand cyborg identity as a condition that results from the fusion of the body with technology (in its myriad

forms), we can use the specialized vocabulary of that theoretical tradition. This in turn permits a deeper understanding of how new forms of technological hybridity interfaced with and amended the reigning constructs of race and gender during different moments of the post-revolutionary era. It is for this reason that I employ an expansive definition of cyborg identity throughout this dissertation; through this means I can more effectively track and explain how new representations of technological hybridity amended contemporary structures of power throughout the post-revolutionary period.

This is not to say that Mexican artists consciously produced cyborg discourses, because they most certainly did not. The term “cyborg” (or cybernetic organism) did not enter the scientific vocabulary until the 1960s, when Manfred E. Clynes and Nathan S. Kline theorized it as a means of achieving space travel (29-31); what is more, Haraway did not theorize the figure’s resistance to constructions of gender and race until the 1980s. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition, and fusion, of the body with technology played a key role in race formation as it transformed problematic bodies, both women and/or Amerindians, into full-fledged participants in the *mestizo* state. Many of the technologies discussed in this dissertation were common in urban Mexico and throughout the Western world, but they had not yet reached the rural, indigenous population. As state actors infused indigenous bodies with these technologies they initiated Amerindians into the *mestizo* state. It is for this reason that post-revolutionary *letrados* of many political persuasions viewed technological hybridity as a key component of Mexican modernity, a fact that they emphasized as they represented cyborg imageries across multiple media. Ultimately, these lettered discourses aided in redefining nation’s “authentic,” racial identity as they provided strategies for Amerindians to become *mestizos*. Clearly, cyborg theory provides fascinating insights to Mexican literary and cultural production, especially as it relates to lettered



attempts to inculcate *mestizo* normativity throughout the population.

A reading of Gray and Clark suggests that post-revolutionary *letrados* transformed Mexicans of all races into cyborg actors as their art and literature reprogrammed indigenous Mexico's relationship both with itself and with the state. In a sense, artistic representations of cultural nationalism—which proclaimed the incipient modernization of the indigenous body through its fusion with technology—became “technologies of the Self” in the Foucauldian sense in that they coerced indigenous Mexicans into adopting *mestizo* values and worldviews in order to express themselves in a way that the state would understand (*Foucault*, “Technologies” 145-69). Because indigenous agency, at least in relation with the state, depended to a great degree on symbols of official *mestizaje*,<sup>46</sup> the indigenous and *mestizo* mind became cyborg entities whose subjectivity depended on how official discourses constructed its agency. This is especially clear as we consider the work of Clark and David Chalmers, who view the mind, and by extension subject formation, as the cyborg result of “active externalism, based on the active role of the environment in driving cognitive processes” (*Supersizing* 220). Bartra enters in direct dialogue with the aforementioned thinkers and states, “lo que encontramos es más bien un complejo sistema cultural y tecnológico de prótesis que sustituyen funciones que no podemos hacer o que hacemos lenta e inadecuadamente. Este sistema, junto con el cerebro, constituye la base de la conciencia” (*Cerebro y libertad*). As such, the mind itself is a cyborg in that it is the conjugation of the body, particularly the brain, and external symbols—or Foucauldian technologies—that intertwine to form individual subjectivity.

As the post-revolutionary state inundated the population with *mestizophilic* and *indigenista* discourses of cultural nationalism, it attempted to shape the consciousness of its citizenry. Furthermore, it demarcated the divisions of Amerindian and *mestizo* by signaling the

former as an identity of the past and the latter as the way of the future. Bartra finishes his book *Cerebro y libertad* by stating, “los cyborgs de hoy [. . .] son simplemente humanos con implantes que no parecen tener ningún poder sobre el cuerpo” (*Cerebro y libertad*). This conclusion does an injustice to his own thinking, at least within the context of the post-revolutionary state. Because cultural nationalism produced official discourses that coerced Amerindians (and women of all races) to acquiesce to the highly patriarchal and Eurocentric demands of official *mestizaje*, it appears that prostheses like the aforementioned lettered discourses certainly *did* change people’s cognitive processes, and thus their relationship with the Self. Viewed in this light, contemporary prostheses do have power over the technologically hybrid (cyborg) human body as they force the brain to internalize and negotiate new symbolic meanings. In the context of the post-revolutionary state, discourses of cultural nationalism conditioned indigenous people to internalize biopolitical divisions that marginalized their cultures and ways of knowing. As such, lettered discourses represented oppressive technologies that coercively informed and constructed state power.

As cyborg discourses participated in race formation, they negotiated with the biopolitical state, affirming—and at times creating—a technologically modern *bios*. This observation sits in direct opposition to Haraway’s assertion that “the cyborg is not subject to Foucault’s biopolitics; the cyborg simulates politics, a much more potent field of operations” (163). Haraway writes this because, within her understanding of the cyborg, bodies become interchangeable with each other as we begin to view the body as a mere prosthesis of the brain. Such demystification of the body interferes with the state’s ability to exercise biopolitical power. Although she creatively challenges Foucauldian biopolitics, her writing does not transcend Agamben’s paradigm.<sup>47</sup> Within post-revolutionary Mexico, cyborg subjects do not merely simulate; they become key

political actors. The very allure of technological hybridity in this context was its ability to disrupt a subject's biopolitical status. At times cyborg identity may afford *bios* status to a previously marginalized individual or community; on other occasions, this fusion with technology may simply amplify a person's *bios* (or *zoê*). Whatever the case, despite Haraway's assertions to the contrary, cyborg bodies by definition interface with and inform the biopolitical state. At times they provide strategies of resistance, but they are just as likely—if not more so—to impose their own worldview on the population at large.

This oppressive potential for cyborg identity grates against the grain of Haraway's thought. In her first developments of cyborg identity in 1985, Haraway focused on the figure's liminal status as a hybrid entity articulated from the threshold between the divisions of human, animal, and machine (151-52).<sup>48</sup> Given its ambiguity, the cyborg became the perfect metaphor for questioning the boundaries that divided people, particularly feminists, along lines of race, class, and gender (155-61).<sup>49</sup> This led her to assert a highly liberatory potential latent to the figure as it resisted gendered (and racialized) structures of power. The majority of the criticism has since challenged much of her optimism; Clynes dismisses her arguments when he states that cyborg identity—such as that attained as a person rides a bicycle—does not change a person's "essential identity" (Gray, "Interview" 49). Jennifer González enters in direct dialogue with Haraway as she asserts, "despite the potentially progressive implications of a cyborg subject position, the cyborg is not necessarily more likely to exist free of the social constraints which apply to humans and machines already" (61).<sup>50</sup> González's points are well taken; simple tool use, or even the fusion of the body with technology, does not (generally) change a person's sex or gender, and in the US context from which she writes, it rarely (if ever) amends racial identity. However, this is not the case in Mexico, where there is greater slippage between racial

categories. That technologized bodies would interface with the body politics of Latin American countries differently from those of Europe and North America buoys J. Andrew Brown's argument that current cyborg theories "often fail to transcend the North American and European contexts in which they are articulated" (2). As we refine theorizations of posthuman identity to the Mexican context, it appears that technological modifications to the body redraw the reigning body politics, and, perhaps more interestingly, leave new paradigms of equally rigid racial and gender performativity in their stead.

When Judith Butler developed the term performativity, she did so focusing specifically on the extent to which interpellations of the sexed body produce constructions of gender and sexuality, which in turn shape the agency of individuals within society. However, her observations about gender hold true for other social constructs of corporeal agency—particularly those of race—as well. Haraway wrote her "Cyborg Manifesto" a few years before Butler would publish *Gender Trouble*, and her assertion that cyborg entities break down performative interpellations of the body suggests a special, resistant element to the articulation of the (technologically) hybrid body. Cyborg identity does not automatically denaturalize or subvert interpellations of the body, but it does trouble the reigning body politics—particularly those of race and gender—as it becomes a new body within the system. This forces society to negotiate what privileges and responsibilities cyborg entities should receive, which shows that cyborg identity can be either liberatory or oppressive. Thus it becomes clear that cyborgs themselves are imbued with certain performative qualities. As the technologized body reconfigures the reigning body politics, previously subaltern bodies can become more legible, and thus receive greater privilege. This is rarely due to a more just body politics, but rather to the superimposition of a new type of body onto the system. I ultimately disagree with Haraway's notion of a cyborg that

is generally liberatory because, at least within the Mexican context, technological hybridity aids in race formation and the construction of official *mestizaje*, and these constructs of power necessarily marginalize indigenous actors and women of all races.<sup>51</sup>

Cyborg discourses within post-revolutionary Mexico both elucidate and challenge the ways in which US scholars have previously tied the figure to mixed-race identity. The US Latina scholar Chela Sandoval, for example, attempts to rhetorically deracialize the cyborg by viewing it as “a differential form of oppositional consciousness, as utilized and theorized by a racially diverse U.S. coalition of women of color” (41). Even as she deracializes the figure, she also highlights its ties to hybridity and even *mestizaje* (410-12). Her rhetorical strategy proves useful in maneuvering beyond the black/white racial binary that continued in the US imaginary until at least the end of the twentieth century (Daniel 36), but it is impossible to articulate *mestizaje* free from constructs of race. This is especially the case in Sandoval’s work because her figure only takes on a resistant value as she places it in direct opposition to Western white-male hegemony. She provides excellent theorizations of how US women of color can resist, but her uncritical treatment of *mestizaje* as a discourse of inclusion seems inappropriate in the Mexican context. Part of this is because she inherits the intellectual tradition of Gloria Anzaldúa, whose *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* reconfigured Vasconcelos’s “cosmic race” and posited a “mestiza” as the champion of her own, racially hybrid (and diverse) US Southwest (77-91).<sup>52</sup> Given the constant back-and-forth dialogue between Sandoval and Haraway, as well as Anzaldúa’s prominent role in the background of both women’s writing, it becomes clear that the Chicano/a movement greatly informed theories of cyborg identity. This suggests that Vasconcelos specifically—and, by extension, the post-revolutionary ideology of official *mestizaje* generally—lies in the background of this theoretical tradition. Viewed in this light, our

knowledge of how mixed-race discourses would play out in Mexico proves invaluable in tempering some of cyborg theory's inherent optimism.

Unlike Sandoval, post-revolutionary *letrados* and state officials viewed *mestizaje* as a clear racial identity that could eugenically modernize and improve indigenous Mexico. That it could achieve racial hybridity through technologizing its Amerindians suggests that the liberatory potential of cyborg identity depends on a specific point of view. From an officialist standpoint, changes to the reigning body politics truly did become liberatory as they protected the state from both transnational (particularly US) white supremacy and indigenous backwardness. That said, due to the exceptionally paternal nature of official *mestizaje*—particularly in the guise of *indigenismo*—it is difficult to view its stated goal of “redeeming the Indian” as liberatory when viewed from the indigenous subject position. State projects employed a rhetoric of domination in order to coerce Amerindians—as well as women, workers, and children (Thomas Benjamin 479)—to conform to the patriarchal norms of official *mestizaje*. The post-revolutionary state's especially ambiguous, anti-colonial yet colonizing articulation of technological and racial hybridities calls to mind the assertions of Gill Kirkup, who, regarding cyborg resistance, states that “its usefulness for cultural deconstruction of gender [and race] has become apparent, but its usefulness as a tool for material changes is yet to be proved” (5). Within post-revolutionary Mexico, the cyborg body really did foment “material change,” albeit in the opposite sense. As the state took advantage of the technologized body's potential to denaturalize previous, *Porfirian*, constructs of race and gender, it inscribed a new one that was equally oppressive. Viewed in this light, the technologically hybrid body became a tool that allowed the elite to continue to hold—and enforce—their previously held attitudes on race and gender.

As the state championed the technologized body through various types of media, it

transformed cyborg identity into a tool for imposing *mestizo* normativity on the masses. Post-revolutionary *letrados* would almost certainly agree with Haraway's assertion that the technologized body produces a new hegemonic body politics (210). However, they would probably disagree that it erases interpellations of the body. This becomes especially apparent as we realize that most early-twentieth and mid-twentieth century Mexican cyborgs were clearly raced and gendered. After assimilating to the *mestizo* state, the newly technologically (and racially) hybrid Mexican's role in (modern) society depended to a large extent on constructions of gender and sexuality. Men generally became proletarian workers, while women were asked to reproduce—and raise—a new generation of laborers who would fuel the nation's material progress. Thus these families were asked to uphold traditional views of gender and sexuality in order to, in the words of Louis Althusser, “reproduce the relations of production” by interpellating all individuals into their proper role in society (148). These *mestizo* cyborgs, far from Haraway and Sandoval's romantic notion of a means for subaltern resistance, fall more along the lines of Hernán M. García's understanding of the figure, at least as articulated within certain frameworks, as “víctimas de un sistema hiper-capitalista que se basa en la acumulación y el control de información” (177). If we can identify any one constant between previous theorizations of the cyborg and the entity that we see in Mexican literary and cultural production, it is the figure's ability to change the way that society reads the newly minted cyborg's body. The discursive strength of the post-revolutionary cyborg body was its uncanny ability to change the racial and gendered consciousness of the population at large.

Official discourses almost always asserted an eventual Mexican superation in which the nation would become fully modern and take its place as a leader in the international community. Bartra argues that the state's construction of new, modern protagonists of Mexican history was

ultimately self-destructive. In his words, “el indio agachado no tiene futuro, pero tiene pasado; el Nuevo héroe no tiene pasado, y tampoco tiene futuro. La mitología nacionalista lo ha castrado: ése es el precio que tiene que pagar el proletariado para entrar a formar parte de la cultura nacional” (*Jaula*). Although Bartra claims that the racially hybridized Amerindian has no future, he also notes that the post-revolutionary state “inventa y glorifica a un pueblo dotado de agresiva emotividad, capaz de resistir la inmersión en la fría tecnología y los contaminados y ponzoñosos aires de la sociedad industrial moderna” (*Jaula*). These two quotes allude to official aims to transform indigenous bodies into (*mestizo*) workers, and they highlight the alienation that this process produced. In short, the state aimed to overcome indigenous “primitivity” by instituting a *mestizo* society through the articulation of cyborg identities where emotion and technology coexisted. The focus was decidedly future-oriented as it praised a forthcoming superation in Mexico; however, as they severed their ties with the “past”—a move symbolized through the state’s rupture with indigenous “primitivity”—official discourses also struggled to imbue the future with a redemptive value that could resonate in popular and/or intellectual circles.

Racial and technological hybridity proved especially problematic because both were coded specifically as the illegitimate progeny of oppressive systems of domination. Racial hybridity invoked the violent, mythic union of Hernán Cortés with la Malinche (Cypess, *Uncivil Wars* 31).<sup>53</sup> Beyond the obvious ties to colonization, many have cited this relationship as the source of the nation’s painful constructions of race, gender, and ethnicity (Cypess, *Malinche* 1-14; Paz 72-97; Franco, *Plotting Women* xviii-xix, 131-32; Martin 8-13).<sup>54</sup> In a similar vein, Haraway asserts that cyborg identity emerges as “the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism” (151).<sup>55</sup> Certainly, the technological hybridity of Mexico differs from the cyborg of Haraway’s thought in many ways; however, it



still results from Westernized notions of modernity, industry, and economics. Viewed against this backdrop, it comes as no surprise that Bartra would say that the contemporary Mexican has no future. Within this historical and political context, official *mestizaje* was the result of oppressive discourses that went against the values of the Revolution. At the same time, most *letrados* viewed official *mestizaje* as key to resisting Western encroachment in Mexican affairs. Haraway attempts to move beyond the problems of the cyborg genesis when she says that “illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins” (151); as such, the figure is resistant in spite of its oppressive parentage. A similar dynamic emerged within the discourse of official *mestizaje*, where *mestizo* Mexicans may be the progeny of an imperial Europe and a “degenerate” indigeneity, but their racial fusion would create an inclusive, even “cosmic” race (Vasconcelos, *Raza*). Despite its problematic articulation, most *letrados* viewed *mestizaje*, as an evolutionary improvement to the body,<sup>56</sup> a fact that suggests that this construct justifies, and even begs, a posthuman reading.

At its core, posthuman theory denaturalizes the primacy of *homo sapiens* both intellectually and evolutionarily. Within this theoretical lens, contemporary humans evolved from protohuman ancestors (Cochran and Harpending 1-23), and it is only natural that another entity will eventually succeed them. Perhaps the most extraordinary facet to posthuman theory is the idea that contemporary *homo sapiens* are cognizant of their evolutionary potential and that they will play an integral role in their own progression (Doede 227-29; McIntosh 5-6). Many possible articulations of the posthuman could potentially overtake the human.<sup>57</sup> For Robert Doede, one of the defining characteristics of transhumanism (and posthumanism) is its adherents’ belief in “perpetual progress, spurning most traditional biological, genetic, religious, and intellectual constraints on progress, and [ . . . ] an implicit trust in science and technology to

bring unlimited lifespan, intelligence, personal vitality, and freedom” (228).<sup>58</sup> His understanding of trans and posthumanity diverges greatly from (Mendellian) eugenics due to his focus on the technological, rather than biological, transformation of human being. However, in a mid-century Mexican state steeped in Lamarckism, it becomes impossible to distinguish physical changes to the body from those to the genotype. As we have seen, the evolution of the national genome sat at the core of Mexican eugenics, and the state would modify the existing genotype by inflicting modernizing changes on the “primitive” body. This ideology both places *mestizaje* as one of Carlos J. Alonso’s “forward-looking projection[s]” and situates it within an intellectual current that later scholars would denominate as posthumanism. Left to its own accord, racial hybridity could only represent a quantifiable improvement to humanity, a distinction that ultimately placed it within the human sphere. However, as lettered thinkers attempted to transform indigenous bodies into *mestizos* through technological hybridity—and hence cyborg identity—they came to code *mestizaje* as a glorious posthuman articulation of authentic Mexico.

Beyond equating modern *mestizaje* with the posthuman, lettered thinkers frequently and pejoratively ascribed “protohuman” elements to those racial identities that differed from or challenged notions of *mestizo* normativity. In most cases, these protohumans were indigenous, but as I show in Chapter 1, thinkers like José Vasconcelos used protohuman discourses when discussing Anglo-Saxon society. Similar to posthumanism, protohumanism juxtaposes contemporary humanity with an Other whose *bios* is somehow incommensurable to that of contemporary culture(s). Whereas posthumanism places humanity alongside that which may come, protohumanism considers those “prehistoric” beings that preceded contemporary societies. The difference may be biological, as in the case of *homo sapiens*’ evolutionary ancestors, or it may refer to ancient human beings and civilizations whose ways of life are forever hidden due to

a lack of records (Pratt 15-16). It is problematic to denote pre-Columbian Mexico as prehistoric in chronological terms, but we can still assert a type of protohumanity in that there are no decipherable writings from before the Conquest. For Dale J. Pratt, protohumans “participan de una cultura, y están dotados de un idioma y de un determinado nivel de tecnología, pero a fin de cuentas, son Otros” (17). This definition certainly holds true with regard to pre-Columbian civilizations, where state-sanctioned celebrations of the architecture of Teotihuacán or other archeological sites ultimately both validated the nation’s heritage and affirmed an incommensurable otherness between contemporary Mexico and pre-Columbian society. In this case, protohumanity may have essentialized certain elements of pre-Columbian indigenous societies, but these depictions were generally favorable. Protohumanity came not from any inferiority to modern Mexico, but from the inability for any level of communication between the two societies.

State and lettered thinkers contradicted their generally positive affirmation of pre-Columbian *bios* when they more polemically ascribed a different sort of protohumanity to both the indigenous people of colonial times and even those of contemporary society. Their ability to use this discursive tool to dehumanize present-day indigenous people emerged from a historical referent in which the state has systematically withheld the Amerindian population from history (Rabasa 138-47). Ironically, one key component of these more recent Amerindians’ protohumanity came from their ties to pre-Columbian history. This was especially visible in the muralist movement, where figures like Orozco and to a lesser degree Rivera emphasized the primitivity of colonial Amerindians through clothing and physical features that equated them with cavemen (Karttunen 297). As I show in Chapter 3, the specters of indigenous legend—particularly La Llorona and indigenous mummies—became especially monstrous articulations of

protohumanity. Both of these cases show that, although the state asserted pre-Columbian *bios*, it viewed the possibility of the return of this ancient indigenous culture as an existential threat to modern Mexico. It is no mistake that dehumanizing discourses of protohumanity would be strongest in representations of colonial Mexico and of figures like La Llorona. It is precisely through the sparse documentation of the colonial period that pre-Columbian ways of knowing can emerge in contemporary society. As state and lettered officials juxtaposed protohuman figures with modern *mestizaje*, they made it clear that the latter was the true path for Mexico's future.

Given the scope of my project, I necessarily engage a wide array of literary and cultural production from genres beyond just science fiction. This eclectic approach shows that posthuman theory can help explain how discourses of futurity and modernity have interfaced with—and informed—racial constructs within Mexico since at least the Revolution. Certainly, science fiction has long provided a fertile space for theorizing the posthuman (and the protohuman), but posthuman theory can lead to especially interesting insights when used in other genres. Brown notes as much in his book, *Cyborgs in Latin America*, where he works with an array of literary production to question “how science fiction and fiction specifically coded as not science fiction run together in their consideration of human being as it appears in an increasingly technological world” (3-4). Beyond the advantages of testing a theory in new spaces, there are also serious methodological problems associated with limiting a study to only science fiction texts. As Daniel Link states, “la ciencia ficción construye un universo más o menos *compatible* con la lógica de la ciencia, pero cuyos desarrollos científicos y tecnológicos son *necesariamente* imposibles fuera del universo literario” (10, emphasis in original). While Link limits his observation to scientific “reality,” the ramifications of his argument run much deeper. Posthuman theory can lead to

fascinating insights when applied to science fiction texts, but their applications to the real world are almost always metaphorical. My own discussion shows how posthuman theory sheds light on the official discourses that sat at the center of post-revolutionary Mexico's racial and cultural projects, which were almost always played out in the real world. Indeed, by analyzing both science fiction and non science fiction texts, I emphasize the existence of a posthuman discourse that transcends any single genre. My focus on the technologized body becomes the thread that unites several otherwise disparate examples of officialist literary and cultural production that contributed to post-revolutionary nation-building projects.

At times the representations of the posthuman that I study seem to fit almost too nicely within the thought of scholars who have theorized from the United States and Europe; however, in other instances they show how much the local context matters when constructing these identities. Lettered discourses attempted to impose a new mentality on the inhabitants of Mexico—*criollo*, *mestizo*, and indigenous—that both favored market-based economics and the incorporation of Amerindians into the workforce and metropolitan centers. Racial identity in Mexico stems not only from interpellations of the body, but also from a person's ability to move within "modern" society. The very act of accepting technological hybridity becomes a means by which indigenous Mexicans shed their previous racial identity and conform to the new, *mestizo* imaginary. At least when viewed through the post-revolutionary government's lens of official *mestizaje*, a body could not be both indigenous and cyborg. As they accepted technological hybridity, such bodies entered culturally, economically, and even genetically (in a Lamarckian sense) into the *mestizo* mainstream. Far from liberatory, cyborg discourse often becomes yet another imperializing force. In the pages that follow, I track numerous representations of cyborg and posthuman actors in post-revolutionary literary and cultural production and discuss their

ramifications on racial identity in Mexico. As I look at Mexican essays, films, theatre, and narrative produced between the 1920s and 1970s, my project shows how discourses of race and technology evolved over the decades. However, I also emphasize the remarkable fact that lettered figures constantly returned to representations of the posthuman, technologized body to articulate *mestizo* modernity.

Chapter 1, “Science and the (Meta)physical Body: A Critique of Positivism in the Vasconcelian Utopia,” discusses José Vasconcelos’s notion of a cosmic race through a posthuman reading of his seminal essay *La raza cósmica* and his largely forgotten play *Prometeo vencedor*. Because Vasconcelos and his *Ateneo* colleagues were all famously anti-positivist, they were suspicious of scientific discourses that purported to hold a monopoly on the “truth.” However, they also lived in a twentieth century society in which scientific discourse had gained intellectual hegemony. My chapter begins by asserting science as one of many discourses that compose Vasconcelos’s philosophy of Aesthetic Monism, which subordinates human knowledge to an overriding aesthetic imperative. Afterwards, I use a close reading of *Prometeo vencedor* to assert the key role of science—especially in the guise of technology—in establishing both a worldwide *mestizo* society and a spiritual, posthuman superation of the body.

Chapter 2, “Emilio Fernández and the Race for Mexico’s Body: Immunization and Lamarckian Genetics,” looks at an especially interesting articulation of the posthuman within the *indigenista* films of Emilio “El Indio” Fernández. Here I identify an attempt to modernize indigenous peasants by exposing their bodies to modern medicine. I view these films in the context of Roberto Esposito’s “immunization paradigm,” a biopolitical theory that compares the medical process of immunization to the state’s role of subject creation. When a people lacks a natural immunity to a vice—improper racial and gender performativity in the case of these

films—a new actor, such as the state, must step in and provide an artificial immunity. Using this theoretical framework, I analyze his films *Río Escondido* (1947), *María Candelaria* (1944), *Enamorada* (1946), and *The Torch* (1950). My reading of these films suggests an immunological role for within El Indio's films for prescribing the proper racial and gender roles of post-revolutionary Mexican subjects.

Chapter 3, “Waving Aside the Letrado: Mimetic Imperialism in Mexploitation and *La onda*,” views the lettered filmic discourse of Mexploitation cinema in tension with *la onda*, a youth countercultural movement of the 1960s. I focus primarily on El Santo movies and Carlos Olvera's novel, *Mejicanos en el espacio* (1968). El Santo played an authentically Mexican, *mestizo* superhero who defended the nation against both the threat of external empire, symbolized by aliens and foreign mad scientists, and from the specters of the indigenous past. As such, he embodied statist discourses that asserted *mestizo* Mexico's right to colonize its indigenous population even as it decried foreign attempts to meddle in its internal affairs. Olvera's novel imagines a 22<sup>nd</sup> century Centroméjico that attempts to assert its modernity by mimicking the imperial behavior of nations like the US. Unlike Mexploitation, this novel suggests that, as *mestizo* Mexico pursues projects of empire, it ultimately validates the very global hierarchies of power that allow other countries to interfere in Mexican politics. Viewed together, these works show how artists and intellectuals began to challenge lettered representations of *mexicanidad*.

Through these chapters, I show that, despite major shifts in the understanding and articulation of race within Mexico, technology continues to play a key role in race formation and construction in the country well into the twenty-first century. Beyond adding to our understanding of the texts that they engage, these chapters also elucidate the attitudes and

ideologies that inform race relations in the country at large. As we look at Mexican literary and cultural production, we get a glimpse into some of the country's brightest minds regarding the role of technology in subject formation. Through these case studies, I show how numerous thinkers over the past century have invoked various hybridities to reconcile questions of race, gender, culture, and modernity within the nation. Hybridity informs not only Latin American theorists, but also postcolonialists like Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy. "Embodying Modernity in Mexico: Technology and the Body in the *Mestizo* State" adds to current conversations in both fields by focusing on the hybrid body. Posthuman studies, far from representing a fringe discipline, provides interesting insights to how post-revolutionary Mexican society placed the body within discourses of modernity. This dissertation is one of the first studies to consider a century's worth of posthuman discourses in a single Latin American country. One of my aims in writing is to show the value of in-depth case studies in discussing how posthuman entities interface with the state and postcolonial discourses not only in Mexico, but throughout Latin America, and perhaps the entire "Third World." As we have seen, the ramifications of cyborg identity change drastically when technologically hybrid identities are articulated outside of the United States and Europe. Another aim of mine is to add to our understanding of twentieth and twenty-first century identity discourses in Mexico, particularly the problematic relationship between official *mestizaje* and modernity. In this case, posthuman theory and notions of hybridity provide a fresh perspective from which to view the age-old questions of Mexican Studies.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lund is hardly alone in asserting a connection between *mestizaje*, capitalism, and modernity. See also Pedro Ángel Palou (13-37), Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (“Introduction”), and Kelly R. Swarthout (52-66). Claudio Lomnitz defines *mestizaje* as “the process wherein communities are extracted from their cultures of origin without being assimilated into the dominant culture” (*Labyrinth* 39). Rather than view the construct from the statist point of view, then, Lomnitz views *mestizaje* primarily as the problematic racial constructions that would result from the economic projects of the post-revolutionary government.

<sup>2</sup> As the linguist Marcia Farr observes, “comments about the indigenous, whether positive or negative, always make it clear that they are different, and usually relegate them to lower status” (67).

<sup>3</sup> Mexico’s racial composition goes beyond the simple binary of *indígena* and *criollo* with the *mestizo* serving as a fusion of both. The country has inherited a vibrant culture from people of African descent as well. See Bobby Vaughn (118-33).

<sup>4</sup> I ultimately uphold that race is a social construction; however, this construction has its roots in observed phenotypic, and hence genetic, differences. Scientists like Gregory Cochran and Henry Harpending state “no Finn could be mistaken for a Zulu, no Zulu for a Finn” (14). They later cite recent discoveries that suggest that people of different races—and even classes—have evolved in ways that may affect brain development and even temperament (113-19). The authors’ assertion undoubtedly depends on a problematic racialization of geographic space, but in so doing it also draws attention to the confluences of biology and race. Distinctions of phenotype have existed for milenia, but race emerged as a construct in the West only after

European nations began building economies that assigned people specific roles of production based on phenotype. See Vijay Prashad (1-36). The constructed nature of race becomes obvious when we look at how different countries negotiate racial identity. In the United States, the “one drop policy” decreed that people with a single drop of “black blood” were black even if they were phenotypically white. See Cheryl I. Harris (“Whiteness as Property”). In Mexico, however, Amerindians could become *mestizo* by changing their dress and grooming and by contributing to the national economy. See Knight (“Racism” 72-78). The fact that two different countries policed racial distinction in such different ways attests to the fact that, far from genetically determined, race is a social construction.

<sup>5</sup> In 1950, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) declared that the notion of race had become unfortunately politicized (5-10). This official declaration both affirms that all of humanity is basically the same and asserts genetic difference as essential to racial identity. Rather than challenge scientific racism per se, then, the UNESCO chastises politicians for attaching varying degrees of value to differently raced homo sapiens. This report does not, however, recognize race as the conflation of genetic (and phenotypic) difference and socially constructed relations of power that relate back to performative readings of the body.

<sup>6</sup> I have previously noted that the relationship between science and race in Spanish America actually dates back to the earliest days of the conquest (“Objetividad” 122-37).

<sup>7</sup> Claudio Lomnitz documents that Amerindian privileges decreased after the country gained independence because state leaders aimed to consolidate a national consciousness (*Labyrinth* 276). Ironically, in its attempts to articulate a single nation, the nineteenth century state withheld basic citizenship from its indigenous citizens. See Quijano (557).

<sup>8</sup> Alan Knight asserts that Revolutionary discourse was never truly racial; instead it was “couched in class rather than race terms” that “pitted peasants against landlords, not Indians against whites or mestizos” (76). He further argues that these class grievances “did not form part of a sustained policy of *Indian* self-assertion” (76). Within his thought, then, any assertion of the Revolution as the moment when indigenous Mexico achieved its consciousness comes in retrospect (“Racism” 76-77).

<sup>9</sup> Lomnitz traces Mexican and New Spanish racial ideologies from the colony to the post-revolutionary state and asserts the Contact Period, Independence, and the Revolution as three major ruptures that led to new understandings and attitudes regarding racial identity in the country (*Labyrinth* 262-80). For his part, Thomas B. Irving states that “the real master of the nineteenth century was the mestizo; but the mestizo erred by trying to assimilate French culture as fervently as the Indian before him had adopted the Christian Saints” (xii). This seems to suggest that *mestizos* did have a prominent role in Mexican society in the nineteenth century, but unlike the official *mestizaje* following the Revolution, the nineteenth century incarnation emphasized ties to Europe and generally ignored its ties to indigeneity and/or Africa.

<sup>10</sup> Sánchez Prado recognizes that many new articulations of Mexican identity have taken shape in recent years that move beyond *mestizaje* (*Naciones* 242). In *Screening Neoliberalism: Transforming Mexican Cinema 1988-2012* he argues that one effect of the neoliberal reforms in the national film industry was “a decline of Mexicanist [*mestizophilic*] ideologies.” Discourses of *mestizaje* are not as heavy-handed as they were during the mid-twentieth century, but the idea remains within the national imaginary.

<sup>11</sup> I use the term technological hybridity to denote the process of fusing the body with technology in its myriad forms: factory work, medicine, industrial agriculture, and so forth. In

many ways, technological hybridity is synonymous with cyborg identity; both emerge from the juxtaposition of the body with technology, and as I explain later in this chapter, both amend the reigning body politics.

<sup>12</sup> Gender exists as a hybridity in many Mexican works. Of particular interest is the art of Frida Kahlo, which deconstructs rigid divisions of masculinity and femininity. Arturo Ripstein's film *El lugar sin límites* (1977), based on José Donoso's eponymous 1966 novel, also engages gender hybridity in very interesting ways.

<sup>13</sup> Antonio Cornejo Polar recognizes both *mestizaje* and hybridity as risky terms in Latin American Studies because they are borrowed from other disciplines. He is especially critical of *mestizaje* due to its violent history, but he is also careful not to be too permissive of Canclini's theorizations of hybridity. While attracted to the notion that a person can enter and leave hybridity at will, the concept's overall optimism troubles him ("Mestizaje and Hybridity").

<sup>14</sup> Gruzinski posits his own definition of *mestizaje* as "fragmented, fractured worlds [. . .] with often rudimentary communication" (51). This is an excellent definition of *mestizaje* in general. However, official *mestizaje* attempted to establish a new racial homogeneity through hybridity. As such, it aimed to bridge gaps in communication by prescribing the proper articulation of racial hybridity. In this way it could silence other articulations of *mestizaje*.

<sup>15</sup> Santiago views Latin American *mestizaje* as a construction that grows out of the European imaginary of a dualistic system of the civilized and the barbarian. The *mestizo* is an especially troubling figure because it embodies both of these tendencies (1-3).

<sup>16</sup> Bonfil Batalla asserts that two oppositional nations, the indigenous and the mestizo, inhabit Mexico (28-32).

<sup>17</sup> *Mexicanidad*, *lo mexicano*, and Mexicanness are all terms that search for what it means

to be Mexican. Some key aspects of this are the nation's colonial history and its racial composition. See Joseph *et al* (9); Stern (2-4).

<sup>18</sup> Lettered examples of cultural nationalism were most prevalent in the visual arts. Sánchez Prado notes that the situation was much different in literature, where post-revolutionary writers created what he calls “naciones intelectuales.” These were intellectual critiques of the post-revolutionary state that at times coincided with—and at others detracted from—the official discourse(s) of the post-revolutionary state (1; 15-17).

<sup>19</sup> Rama notes the importance of the Mexican Revolution to Latin American thought and identity when he asserts this as the event that would usher the region into the twentieth century (103). While he specifically asserts that this movement set the tone for the political violence that would plague the region throughout the century, he also shows that Latin America's intellectual nature changed during these years (83-102; 103-26).

<sup>20</sup> Mary K. Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis's edited volume, *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* contains numerous essays that discuss different ways in which the state manipulated popular culture to propagate myths of *mestizaje* and cultural nationalism.

<sup>21</sup> The *misiones culturales* imagined that *mestizo* teachers—whom they referred to as apostles of the Revolution (Palou 16)—would “preach” both the alphabet and cultural consciousness. See Víctor Díaz Arciniega (46-47).

<sup>22</sup> Swarthout defines *indigenismo* as a tradition that “regards the ancient Mexican civilizations as the seat of the national cultural heritage” (29). Despite this reification of the indigenous past, Swarthout further notes that “the goal of the *indigenista* movement was the assimilation of Mexico's ‘minority’ cultures (numerically the majority) into the dominant

national one” (56). *Indigenismo*, then, was a discursive tool that *mestizo* officials employed to transform the nation’s Amerindians into *mestizos*.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Gillingham generally notes that there “was a sea change in the way politics was done in Mexico between 1940 and 1952” (177), but he also problematizes studies that have been perhaps too lenient in their criticism of the previous decades (180-81).

<sup>24</sup> The shifts within the Mexican literary community from 1917 to 1959 comprise the subject matter of Sánchez Prado’s book *Naciones intelectuales: Las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana*.

<sup>25</sup> Unlike *indigenismo*, *hispanismo* was a current of official *mestizaje* that focused primarily on racial and cultural ties to Europe and whiteness. Whereas *indigenistas* depended on scientific advances that undermined indigenous inferiority, *hispanistas* “promoted the idea of a spiritual bond that united all Mexican people in the Iberian tradition” (Swarthout 89). For a discussion on *indigenista* and *hispanista* approaches to official *mestizaje*, see Swarthout (95-123).

<sup>26</sup> Enrique Dussel notes how Latin American attempts at modernity have assigned specific roles to people depending on constructs of race, gender, and even age (21).

<sup>27</sup> Sarah Babb notices a similar rupture in Mexican economic policy in her book *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism*. She does not engage the idea of a *letrado*, yet she notes—and organizes her book around—the state’s shift towards neoliberalism as a process that began in 1970. Given that scholars from such different disciplines and theoretical angles would recognize the late 1960s and early 1970s as a key time of change emphasizes these decades’ transitional place in the nation’s history.

<sup>28</sup> By extending my understanding of the *letrado* beyond the written word, and

particularly by including film as a form of lettered discourse, my project questions the reigning wisdom that suggests that the Mexican lettered city disappeared for good by the 1970s. The state continued to have a vested interest in officialist film that upheld the values of official *mestizaje*, and few genres more neatly achieved this for the state than the Mexploitation film of figures like El Santo and Blue Demon. Certainly, as B-movies, these films differed greatly from those that had gone before. However, these commercially successful works continued to communicate *mestizophilic* discourses to the masses through the 1970s and into the 1980s.

<sup>29</sup> Palou is not the first person to argue that certain aspects of official *mestizaje* lasted beyond 1968. Indeed, Bonfil Batalla argues that the neoliberal state of the 1980s remained dedicated to “civilizing the country” (*México profundo* 217-28), a fact that suggests that the state remained engaged in internal empire even after official *mestizaje* had lost its political allure.

<sup>30</sup> The post-revolutionary state was not the only Mexican entity to look towards the future and progress as a means of national superation. Within the literary realm, Amado Nervo heralded “*futurismo*” as a new movement that would improve Mexican (literary) modernism (929-35). Of course, because this movement came from Italy, its values were associated with Europe, rather than with the indigenous. Within the philosophical realm, the thinker Andrés Molina Enríquez had already written *Grandes problemas nacionales*, a book that both discussed the social obstacles to Mexican progress and also posited the eventual “triumph” of *mestizaje* both in Mexico and throughout the world.

<sup>31</sup> Writing in 1966, the historian Albert L. Michaels asserted that fascism did not creep into the national discourse until the 1930s, when “many foes of the Mexican Revolution sought to organize political movements capable of challenging the Revolutionary regime” (234; 234-50). Within his thought, state leaders, particularly Lázaro Cardenas, bravely stood up to the

fascist threat of sympathizers with Franco, Hitler, and Mussolini. As time has passed, earlier post-revolutionary ties to fascism have become more visible, thus calling Michaels's interpretation of history into question.

<sup>32</sup> As they championed an essentialistically superior spiritual dynamic to Mexican society, state *letrados* echoed the thought of José Enrique Rodó, whose *Ariel* also claimed a superior Latin American soul.

<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, constructions of race, like *indigenismo*, largely informed protectionist measures. See Lomnitz (*Labyrinth* 277-80).

<sup>34</sup> Mexico would ultimately side with the United States and its allies during World War II, but this was hardly a unanimous decision. María Emilia Paz Salinas's book, *Strategy, Security, and Spies: Mexico and the U.S. as Allies in World War II*, outlines how both Germany and the US competed for Mexico's affection during the war. One of the earliest Mexican science fiction novels, Diego Cañedo's *El réferi cuenta nueve* (1943), was written to convince its readers that an alliance with Germany would hurt Mexico far more than a US victory.

<sup>35</sup> Basave Benítez defines *mestizophilia* as "la idea de que el fenómeno del mestizaje—es decir, la mezcla de razas y/o culturas—es un hecho deseable" (13).

<sup>36</sup> Along with Rivera's many Mexican murals that reify Mexico's indigenous heritage, see also his US work, particularly *Pan American Unity* and *Vaccination*. Both of these murals clearly dialogue with science, race, and *mestizaje*.

<sup>37</sup> Alexandra Stern notes that, rather than discuss "race" specifically, La Sociedad Mexicana de Eugenesia opted for the term biotypes which were "characterized by a complex mixture of relational factors according to seemingly neutral categories of normal, average, and media" (2).



<sup>38</sup> The biopolitical status of the Amerindian population is quite nuanced within the work of post-revolutionary lettered thinkers. Chapter 2 suggests that Agamben's paradigm is necessary yet insufficient to understanding post-revolutionary biopolitical attitudes.

<sup>39</sup> Antebi builds on the work of Michael Oliver, who distinguishes disability from impairment by asserting that disability constitutes "the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from the mainstream of social activities" (qtd. in Oliver 11).

<sup>40</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn defines science as a process in which falsifiable observations are organized into paradigms (*Structure* 10-11). Because these paradigms are ultimately human constructs, the social conditions of a specific society frequently affect how scientific knowledge is transmitted, articulated, and received ("Objectivity" 387). At times, cultural factors may inform a society's decision to favor one paradigm over another.

<sup>41</sup> The idea that hygiene and education could alter and perfect dysgenic bodies placed Latin American (Lamarckian) geneticists at odds with their Nordic and US counterparts. The US eugenicist Albert E. Wiggam stated that people generally inherited their abilities from their forbears. However, "if parents educate themselves it does not cause their children to be born any brighter or more moral; but if bright and good people marry only bright and good people, their children are born with strong tendencies toward goodness, intelligence and virtue" (292). The British editor, K. E. Trounson more explicitly proclaimed the rift between Latin American and Anglo-Saxon eugenics when he stated that Brazil—and by extension all of Latin America—was not very scientific in its implementation of eugenics. According to him, within Latin America, "genetics and natural and social selection are rather neglected; the outlook is more sociological

than biological” (236). Rather than unproblematically accept Trounson’s assertion, however, we should remember that Latin American eugenicists considered their work to be highly scientific. This is especially clear as we look at how they rigorously executed their hygiene plans within Lamarckian paradigms and frameworks. That their eugenics would play a sociological role in society was to be expected; indeed, commentators from the twenty-first century recognize that Great Britain’s twentieth-century eugenics were also sociologically inspired.

<sup>42</sup> As Stepan notes, Lamarckian genetics were not limited to Mexico and Latin America. Instead, they were also very popular within “Latin” countries like France and Italy within Europe as well (2-3).

<sup>43</sup> Villoro notes numerous strategies—particularly the study of indigenous art, religions, and ways of knowing—that intellectuals employed to redeem the nation’s indigenous. Any attempts at redemption would fail if they did not consider the spiritual dimensions of official *mestizaje*. See Villoro (218-22).

<sup>44</sup> Beyond asserting that all contemporary humans are cyborgs, Clark also states that cyborg identity—which he terms as “cognitive hybridization”—is nothing new. Instead, he traces the “cognitive fossil trail” at least as far back as language acquisition (4), a fact that suggests that humans have been cyborgs since prehistoric times.

<sup>45</sup> Expansive definitions of the cyborg are not limited to posthuman circles; indeed, academics like Richard Schechner—a founder of performance studies—write that “people, and the societies people create, are actually cyborgs, hybrid beings interacting with and extended by mediated data” (ix).

<sup>46</sup> It is problematic to state that indigenous subjectivity must always pattern itself after *mestizo* Mexico or to suggest in the vein of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak that these subaltern

subjects can never speak. Nevertheless, we should note José Rabasa's argument that Amerindians cannot "interface with the state" without acquiescing to its understanding of indigeneity and modernity (*Without History* 4). This distinction reminds us that the subaltern frequently speak and interact among themselves in ways that are illegible to the state.

<sup>47</sup> Although Haraway proclaims a cyborgian end to biopolitics, her own writing has proven foundational in the work of the Italian biopolitical theorist Roberto Esposito.

<sup>48</sup> Jennifer Parker-Starbuck notes other intersectionalities of discourses that contribute to cyborg identities such as those "of popular culture, science, technology, medicine, and other fields" (7).

<sup>49</sup> Interestingly, Sara Anne Potter asserts a series of cyborgian "technified muses" in Mexico's avante-garde literature and art from the end of the Revolution until approximately 2000. Her reading is much more in line with Donna Haraway's liberatory paradigm, a fact that suggests that the technologized body played numerous different roles in society depending on who was imagining it at a given time.

<sup>50</sup> Anne Balsamo challenges Haraway by asserting that she "fails to consider how the cyborg has already been fashioned in our cultural imagination" (155). Her criticism suggests that cyborg identities are just as likely—if not more so—to amplify divisions of race, gender, and sexuality as they are to undermine them.

<sup>51</sup> Although Vasconcelos and "El Indio" are the two *letrados* that receive my most in-depth analysis, many other figures also viewed technological hybridity as a means of modernizing indigenous bodies. Beyond Caso and Gamio, it is important to note the extent to which the hybrid body informed the work of the muralists—particularly Rivera and Orozco.

<sup>52</sup> Significantly, Anzaldúa's US appropriation of Vasconcelian thought was much more

inclusive than its forbear, so *mestizo* discourses in the US tend to lack the imperial nature inherent to its articulation within Mexico.

<sup>53</sup> For a more detailed look at how Martín Cortés's birth, coupled with his parents' romantic relationship, continues to inform imagined performative roles along both racial and gender lines, see Cypess (*Uncivil Wars* 22; 31-33).

<sup>54</sup> Just as Judith Butler argues, "the social regulation of race emerges not simply as another, fully separable, domain of power from sexual difference or sexuality" (*Bodies*). Instead, Butler asserts race, gender, and sexuality as intertwining performative traits of the body that combine to inform, and even produce, individual subjectivity.

<sup>55</sup> Kirkup notes a contradictory element to Haraway's understanding of the cyborg who, on the one hand "would not recognize the Garden of Eden; it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (151), but on the other hand is the progeny of militarism and state socialism. See Kirkup (8).

<sup>56</sup> Not all post-revolutionary thinkers believed *mestizaje* would overcome the pitfalls of its violent inception. For example, Octavio Paz referred to *mestizo* society—and Mexicans in general—as "hijos de la Chingada" (88).

<sup>57</sup> Ramez Naam imagines numerous ways that cybernetic technology—both through artificial intelligence and numerous advanced prostheses to the body—could (or will) usher in a posthuman society (233).

<sup>58</sup> For Robert Doede, transhumanism is the self-conscious effort of humanity to transcend the homo sapiens (225).

## Chapter 1

### Science and the (Meta)Physical Body: A Critique of Positivism in the Vasconcelian Utopia

No thinker more fully embodies post-revolutionary Mexican racial attitudes than José Vasconcelos, the great proponent of Latin American *mestizaje* (Lund, *Impure* 108). He first publicly enunciated his “aesthetic” ideal of racial hybridity in Lima in 1916, and he would go on to write numerous texts on the subject that had a great effect throughout Latin America (Marentes 80). He spent most of the Revolution abroad, but returned to Mexico after President Luis Obregón invited him to head the country’s education efforts. Vasconcelos founded the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) and served as its first minister from 1921-1924. As a government leader he explicitly opposed both positivism and *indigenismo* on philosophical grounds,<sup>1</sup> but his work largely—and perhaps inadvertently—buoyed each of the aforementioned discourses by adding a metaphysical value to mixed-race identity. It is truly remarkable that his racial theory, which flirted with fascism (Sánchez Prado, “Mestizaje” 390), also reverberated so well with the thought of such disparate figures as the communist muralists, the leaders of the modernity-driven capitalist state, and even Chicano activists in the Southwestern United States (Anzaldúa 77; Stavans 4-6; 11-13).<sup>2</sup> At times Vasconcelos disapproved of how others articulated his ideas;<sup>3</sup> at others he compromised his aesthetic ideals with political pragmatism (Fell, *Águila* 216; Swarthout 119-21).<sup>4</sup> Given his intellectual and political involvement in the post-revolutionary state, Vasconcelos became the most influential Mexican philosopher, and indeed one of the most prominent Latin American *letrados*, of the early twentieth century (Romanell 501).

His famous essay, *La raza cósmica* (1925), which problematically argues for *mestizo*

identity in Mexico, has enjoyed a special place in the Mexican canon because it supposedly captures the essence of the mixed-race dogmas that permeated the post-revolutionary state. Ironically, he published the work while living in exile in Barcelona shortly after resigning from his position with the SEP,<sup>5</sup> so his text was not immediately available within his home country. However, his “language of race” had already played a fundamental role in shaping discourses of *mexicanidad* far beyond the academy (Lund, *Mestizo x*). Octavio Paz noted the philosopher’s perpetual relevance within Mexican thought when he wrote, “No es difícil encontrar en el sistema vasconceliano fragmentos todavía vivos fecundas, iluminaciones, anticipos” (167).<sup>6</sup> Vasconcelos aimed to create a new Mexican and Latin American society through his writing and participation in the government. Despite many studies that cite his as the authoritative voice of early post-revolutionary official *mestizaje*, his work also had serious breaches with official discourses. Nevertheless, given his prominence in the public sphere, his was one of the most influential voices of the Mexican intelligentsia. Prior to writing *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos had already published other texts, most notably the philosophical play *Prometeo vencedor* (1916?),<sup>7</sup> that identified mixed-race identity as key to progress and modernity. In this chapter, I read *Prometeo vencedor* alongside *La raza cósmica* through a posthuman lens and show that Vasconcelos’s aesthetic of *mestizaje* subordinates scientific discourse to metaphysical ideals with the end goal of producing an improved humanity—and even posthumanity.<sup>8</sup>

Vasconcelos’s racial theory reduces world history to a narrative in which different races have dominated global politics for a finite period of time before humanity advances and a new race takes over (*Raza* 5-13). The Mexican thinker’s racial theory builds on, yet paradoxically rejects, the work of Herbert Spencer, a nineteenth century English philosopher who believed that all human races had evolved to fit their natural habitats. Spencer asserted that humanity is ever

evolving in all parts of the globe (26-29); however, “the white man excels [. . .] in moral susceptibility” (25). While Vasconcelos agreed that humanity was in a process of constant progression, he resisted Spencer’s notion of European—particularly Anglo-Saxon—moral superiority and instead posited *mestizaje* as the racial ideal. The Mexican *letrado*’s understanding of an ever-progressing humanity placed his work in direct conversation with the evolutionary paradigms of the day, a fact that suggests that his work warrants a posthuman reading. Because one underlying supposition of posthumanism is that it considers humanity to be an evolutionary phase that was born from protohuman ancestors, it is only natural to assume that contemporary humanity will one day sire new posthumanities that will eventually take its place (Enríquez and Gullans; Cochran and Harpending 1-23). Vasconcelos’s *mestizo* identity remains in the human—rather than posthuman—sphere, but it still represents a new, perfected articulation of humanity.

Vasconcelos’s work also reverberated with many of the humanistic thinkers of the day. This is particularly the case with Oswald Spengler, a German author whose book *The Decline of the West* posits that human civilizations are living beings that last for approximately a thousand years before another supplants them. Once again, where Spengler sees a tragic demise of Western (European) society, Vasconcelos sees opportunity for a nascent *mestizaje*. The Mexican philosopher sincerely believed that racial hybrids would eventually become the hegemonic race as white *criollos* interbred with Amerindians and blacks. Despite this mixed heritage, *mestizaje* would not value all sides of the racial equation equally (Ortega 37-42). Vasconcelos believed that European hegemony resulted from superior racial practices, and as a result he favored cultural forms that would Europeanize *mestizo* identity. He constantly affirmed an active role for indigenous subjects in ushering in a utopian humanity; however, these people’s crowning act

would be to sacrifice both body and culture to the national cause by procreating a mixed-race state.<sup>9</sup> As such, Vasconcelos expected Amerindians and blacks to knowingly and happily “redeem” themselves through a “voluntary extinction” that would occur as they interbred with “superior” races (*Raza* 27). This belief would become key to post-revolutionary articulations of internal imperialism that ultimately aimed to irradicate indigenous and African cultures from Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Vasconcelos’s aesthetic justification for *mestizaje* differed from that championed by the post-revolutionary state, whose principle aim was to use *mestizaje* as a discursive tool to incorporate indigenous populations into the workforce (Taylor and Yúdice 26). It is for this reason that Betsabé Arreola Martínez argues that “Vasconcelos jug[ó] un papel fundamental al otorgarle una dimensión filosófica, histórica y antropológica de la heterogeneidad étnica, mediante la incorporación de los pueblos indígenas a la vida civilizada haciéndolos mestizos” (4). Vasconcelos did not want to undertake *indigenista* projects, and he certainly did not wish to build a capitalist state following the US model. Nevertheless, in fetishizing racial hybridity, he aligned himself with the post-revolutionary state’s official *mestizaje*—along with its utilitarian focus. At the same time, official *mestizaje* came to embrace Vasconcelos’s redemptive discourse, thus ascribing metaphysical, nationalistic value to a movement that had previously articulated itself in utilitarian terms. Thus the two visions of racial hybridity were ultimately conflated as one functioned in practice and the other as a philosophical and ideological explanation of national character. The final sentence of the introduction to *La raza cósmica* states: “llegaremos en América, antes que en parte alguna del globo, a la creación de una raza hecha con el Tesoro de todas las anteriores, la raza final, la raza cósmica” (35). Far from merely justifying the incorporation of darker-skinned Mexicans into the economy, Vasconcelos viewed miscegenation



as necessary to redeeming the nation's soul. This spiritual dimension, with its clear allusion to progress, fits especially well within the official discourse of a state that fetishized industrialization and "progreso." As Vasconcelos proclaimed an exceptional, Mexican (*mestizo*) soul, he introduced a redemptive aura to racial hybridity that the state had struggled to produce through utilitarian philosophies alone. As he spoke to Mexico's nationalist sentiments, Vasconcelos further validated miscegenation by persuading more people to accept his aesthetics.

The thinker's close association with the modernity-driven, post-revolutionary state meant that his racial philosophy would inevitably interface with scientific discourses. This is especially noteworthy because Vasconcelos's most visible ideological battle was against positivism, a discourse that took hold during the *Porfiriato* (Quintanilla 195-200; Zea, *Precursores* 117). Charles Hale explains positivist politics thusly: "Its principal characteristics were an attack on doctrinaire liberalism, or 'metaphysical politics,' an apology for strong government to counter endemic revolutions and anarchy, and a call for constitutional reform" (27).<sup>11</sup> The fetish for objective truths produced institutionalized favoritism toward scientific knowledge. Abelardo Villegas argues that this led to serious hubris and assertions of scientific superiority "que nunca defendió la ciencia siempre cautelosa, sino los científicos, los positivistas" (*Autognosis* 11). For this very reason, positivism was vulnerable to critiques from humanistic and metaphysical discourses. The positivists, however, simply attacked, discredited, and ignored those philosophers who challenged them (Zea, *Positivismo* 16). This outright rejection of metaphysical knowledge led Vasconcelos and his *Ateneo* colleagues to militantly resist positivistic discourses in their myriad forms. For example, Vasconcelos asserted that "la relatividad del conocimiento científico, invadiendo las soberanas esferas de la filosofía, transformaba los principios lógicos, la moral y el gusto, y todo el pensamiento" (*Monismo* 91-92). Humanity could only overcome the

resulting “spiritual plague” as it de-emphasized scientific discourse in favor of “aesthetic monism,” or a symphony of discourses without the unnecessary favoring of any particular one (*Monismo* 91-93).

Some of the author’s opposition to positivistic education almost certainly took on a personal dimension; his decision to study law came about only because positivist forces had removed philosophy from university curricula (Jaén xx). Given his historical antagonism toward positivism and the sciences, many critics have interpreted Vasconcelos’s focus on aesthetics as a form of anti-science (Foster 66-67; Garrido 76).<sup>12</sup> These studies rigorously show how Vasconcelos challenges scientific dogmas throughout his work, and they prove invaluable to understanding his thought. Hale, however, asserts that Vasconcelos “repudiated positivism, except in aspects of his social thought” (259). As such, Vasconcelian politics—at least within Hale’s view—would become the post-revolutionary state’s newest incarnation of positivism. Hale is right to recognize certain congruencies between Vasconcelos’s thought and that of his positivist forebears; however, the Mexican philosopher’s focus on spiritualism was antithetical to the positivist message (Villegas, *Autognosis* 9).<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, it seems more precise to view Vasconcelos as anti-positivist, rather than anti-science; indeed, his intellectual symphony must necessarily include science. The question, then, is the position that his philosophy affords to science. Vasconcelos’s allusions to evolution theory—even in light of his violent rejection of Darwinism, and especially Spencerism (*Raza* xv; Stavans 16-17)—places him within the scientific (but certainly not positivist) discourses of the day,<sup>14</sup> even if he does so with a different focus from governmental leaders.<sup>15</sup>

Vasconcelos obsessed about science, and he frequently turned to scientific discourse to buoy his frequently anti-positivist philosophies. This led to “an often unwieldy interdependence

of the mystical and the material” within Vasconcelos’s writings that makes it especially difficult to place him ideologically (Miller 29). Jerry Hoeg clears up some of the confusion by referring to science as “an ‘over there’ within the *Raza cósmica* [and by extension the author’s entire *oeuvre*], an other that must, at some point emerge” (76).<sup>16</sup> Science necessarily sits at the heart of Vasconcelos’s writings, but its role is one of catalyzing a metaphysically perfected, utopian (post)humanity.<sup>17</sup> In this chapter I further develop Hoeg’s “over there” by showing how Vasconcelos carefully crafts a utopian philosophy in which science plays a key, supporting role in the aesthetic, and even metaphysical, politics of continued human evolution.<sup>18</sup> My study differs from older studies on Vasconcelos—like those of Alberto Zum Felde (419-29) and Jaime A. Giordano (545-48)—that emphasize the metaphysical dimension of Vasconcelos’s thought but ignore the role of science beyond that of ideational antagonist.<sup>19</sup> Vasconcelos viewed scientific discourse as a necessary component to his philosophical metaphysics. Indeed, he believed that his work could ultimately bridge the gap between philosophy and the sciences (Jaén xix), thus elucidating the proper path for Mexico, Latin America, and even the world. The writer viewed himself as an apostle, prophet, and even god (Franco, *Plotting Women* 103), so clearly he felt that his aesthetic, metaphysical ideal transcended the boundaries of any socially constructed divisions of human knowledge.

The Mexican philosopher’s primary goal was to place all types of human knowledge—ranging from science to the humanities—in their proper place. Frequently, he would recur to scientific discourses in an attempt to give further credence to his mixed-race utopias. He begins *La raza cósmica* by asserting that geologists now recognize America as the site of Atlantis (3). This (pseudo)scientific argument suggests a forever utopian element, as well as an ancient archeological prestige and culture, in Latin America (Grijalva 336-37).<sup>20</sup> Here we must amend

Paz's assertion that "el tradicionalismo de Vasconcelos no se apoyaba en el pasado: se justificaba en el futuro" (166). Instead, we can more precisely state that Vasconcelos justified his vision of Mexico and Latin America through utopian discourses centered both on the region's past grandeur—which was ironically based on its ties to Europe—and future potential. When theorizing utopias, Ruth Levitas notes a special "function" in which a future (or past) society becomes "a kind of goal" (*Concept* 6). What is more, utopia becomes a "method" for facilitating the "imaginary reconstitution of society" (Levitas, *Method* xiv). Levitas's approach allows us to gauge how Vasconcelos used notions of both past and future to create a regional ideal that appealed to readers from all over Latin America. As the writer asserted Latin American ties to Europe—both through racial hybridity and geology—he asserted an equality with the imperial nations of the West. This in turn intellectually justified anti-imperial sentiments throughout Mexico and Latin America.

It is especially interesting that Vasconcelos communicated his resistant, utopian vision through the essay, a genre that he disdained due to its Anglo-Saxon—and hence imperliastic—origins (Townsend 41).<sup>21</sup> Of course, as Ignacio Sánchez Prado explains, *La raza cósmica* is an "ensayo utópico," a genre that the Ateneo adopted as a response to the more generic English essay ("Mestizaje" 387-89). The critic argues convincingly against taking Vasconcelos's text literally, saying instead that we should view the thinker's *mestizaje* as a political strategy to articulate Latin American diversity—and unity—that serves as a precursor to transculturation, heterogeneity, and even hybridity ("Mestizaje 382-83).<sup>22</sup> *La raza cósmica* resists British and US imperialism in all of its forms as its very genre transgresses Anglo-Saxon literary norms. Something similar occurs in *Prometeo vencedor* which, as an unstageable playscript (Townsend 48), also resists generic boundaries. It was probably this unperformable playscript that led

Claude Fell to lament Vasconcelos's "desafortunadas incursiones al teatro" ("Ideario" 550). The quality of the work aside, this playscript provides fascinating insights into the writer's thought. Given *Prometeo vencedor*'s intricate nature and deep intratextual relationship with *La raza cósmica*, it is surprising that the academy has largely forgotten it.<sup>23</sup> The two texts represent different periods in Vasconcelos's life and career.<sup>24</sup> The essay came out shortly after his tenure with the SEP, and it preceded his failed presidential run by only four years,<sup>25</sup> while the writer published his play before he embarked on his career as a public servant. As such, rather than emphasize *mestizaje* as a political strategy, this earlier text couches mixed-race identity primarily in aesthetic terms. This shift in focus allows for fresh perspectives regarding the key role Vasconcelos imagined for science in bringing about a spiritual, utopian rebirth of humanity.

The Mexican philosopher's emphasis on a future utopia leads Silvia Spitta to argue that *La raza cósmica* "today reads more like science fiction than the American and *mestizo* manifesto Vasconcelos proposed to write" (334). She would probably say the same about *Prometeo vencedor*, where (imagined) actors utilize futuristic technologies and embody mixed-race, eugenically improved, protagonists. However, Vasconcelos's use of the utopian ideal differs from that generally employed in science fiction, where dystopia is usually the norm. The author and playwright shows no fatal flaws in his *mestizo* societies; instead, he emphasizes the harmonious nature of the mixed-race world order. Within his world, eugenic and technological advancements have worked hand-in-hand with enlightened, lettered philosophies and ideals to catalyze a truly "cosmic" (or celestial) race. Once again we see a potential for the reconciliation of scientific and humanistic, metaphysical knowledge, but any attempt at this must recognize the ultimate supremacy of the metaphysical.

This tension between science and the spirit played out dramatically in Vasconcelos's

tenure with the SEP. The Minister of Education aimed to provide identical educational opportunities to Mexican children regardless of race. Indeed, he felt it would not make sense to provide different services to *criollos*, *mestizos*, Amerindians, and blacks if each of these races were key ingredients to his idealistic *mestizaje*.<sup>26</sup> However, certain positivists, particularly Manuel Gamio, undertook *indigenista* initiatives that aimed to incorporate Mexican Amerindians into the mestizo state by tailoring education to this population's needs. Faced with this reality, Vasconcelos would have to compromise his personal ideologies and authorize *indigenista* policies "because he feared that the SEP would lose its mandate for indigenous education to the 'scientists' in the Department of Anthropology" (Swarthout 119). This resulted in two oppositional government ministries charged with assimilating the indigenous population. The SEP advocated a cleansing of the Spirit and the return to Catholicism, while Gamio's Department of Anthropology favored science and secularism (Swarthout 120; Fell *Águila* 221). The disagreement between the ministers of education and anthropology probably cost the country a great deal of resources and direction as it attempted to assimilate its indigenous population. Furthermore, their at times contradictory government agencies undoubtedly sent mixed messages to rural Amerindians regarding the means and reasons for assimilation.

Gamio and Vasconcelos positioned science differently in their writing due to how they viewed positivistic discourse. As Sánchez Prado argues, "para Gamio, buen heredero del positivismo, correspondía a la ciencia el desarrollo de la nación, y el mestizaje se refería simplemente [. . .] a la integración del indio a la vida nacional por medio de los instrumentos de la antropología moderna" ("Mestizaje" 386). At the same time, he asserts that Vasconcelos viewed mixed-race identity as "una promesa histórica construida de la validación del mestizaje como eje político cultural" (387). Herein lies the distinction between the competing visions of

*mestizaje* of Gamio and Vasconcelos: the philosopher emphasizes the metaphysical, utopian value of mixed-race identity, while the anthropologist seeks only to use science to objectively modernize the state. These differences most certainly informed the decision of both men to found oppositional missions within their secretariats to engage indigenous Mexico. Gamio hoped to create a (neo)positivist society, while Vasconcelos aimed to redeem his nation's spirit. Certainly, their contradictory justifications for *mestizaje* could, and often did, align themselves one with another,<sup>27</sup> but these men disagreed about the proper balance of science and religion in a secular, *mestizo* society.

Despite his preference for the spiritual, we should not dismiss Vasconcelos's racial thought as wholly unscientific. The author clearly wished to engage with positivistic discourses—albeit from a humanist perspective—in order to reframe the knowledge that these produced. This was most obvious regarding eugenics, which was an accepted paradigm within European—particularly British, German, and North American—circles long before Vasconcelos would ever put the pen to the page (Stepan 8).<sup>28</sup> Many contemporary historians, intellectuals, and critics severely criticize the scientific racism of the early twentieth century, but few would go as far as to label it as a pseudoscience; instead, they generally cite more recent scientific advances that have disproven these older paradigms (Stepan 5). Vasconcelos seems to have generally upheld the ideas behind white supremacist eugenics—particularly those that asserted the inferiority of Amerindians and Afro-Mexicans—but by rearranging the observations, and his history of racial progression, he inscribed the *mestizo*, rather than the white European, as the model, eugenic specimen.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *letrado*'s philosophy reverberated with Latin American science, where eugenicists adopted Lamarckian genetics in an attempt to explain how racially

hybrid (read: dysgenic) people could become eugenic through adopting healthier lifestyles (Stepan 25-26). Unlike Mendelian genetics, Lamarckism supposed that physical changes to an individual would be subsequently passed down to that person's offspring. Mendelian genetics achieved universal acceptance by the 1950s; however, if academics insist on anachronistically imposing a now universally accepted paradigm on previous scientific ages, they block themselves from understanding the intimate relationship between a society and the reigning scientific understandings.<sup>29</sup> Unlike Lamarckists, Vasconcelos did not use science to validate his *mestizo* ideal; instead, his reification of *mestizaje* produced a similar critique of the reigning (Northern) European paradigms by subordinating current eugenic ideas to his aesthetics. Thus his contradiction of imperialist, scientific white supremacy resulted from his own "hyperracial" construction (Lund, *Mestizo x*),<sup>30</sup> and was born not out of positivism, but humanism.<sup>31</sup> Although he would most famously articulate his ideas in *La raza cósmica*, his earliest treatment of a redemptive miscegenation occurred in *Prometeo vencedor*, the text to which I will dedicate the balance of this chapter.

### **Posthuman Presences in *Prometeo vencedor***

Vasconcelos dedicates the majority of his three act play to three principal characters: Prometeo, Satanás, and a philosopher who is later reincarnated as Saturnino. Through various dialogues, the playwright constructs a dialectic that he feels validates his aesthetics of miscegenation more adequately than would the essay (*Monsimo* 112-13). María Sten categorizes the work as "más filosófica que dramática" (42), a fact that rings particularly true given that, as mentioned before, the play was never staged. Townshend, however, asserts an implicitly dramatic nature to *Prometeo vencedor* because its form forces its readers to stage the experience



in their own minds (60). Her argument suggests that we can use theories of performance to interpret the play, which is especially interesting because Vasconcelos emulates the dialogues of the Greek dialectic tradition.<sup>32</sup> The playwright differs from his classical mentors in that he includes a stronger narrative and a more explicitly theatrical element to his text than did his predecessors (Socrates famously excluded actors and other “liars” from his Republic). It is this performance-based element, coupled with the at times tenuous narrative thread, that makes *Prometeo vencedor* resonate with its audience more than would a simple series of conversations.

A brief plot summary will facilitate the discussion of the play’s treatment of race and scientific discourse. The first act begins when Satanás finds Prometeo sitting between Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl, the two famous volcanoes that separate Mexico City and Puebla. They talk about their different philosophies of rebellion, and realize that both wish to liberate humans from enslaving discourses of power. After their conversation, a recently deceased Latin American philosopher appears on his journey to the afterlife. He proclaims that the people of Latin America will resolve their problems by embracing racial hybridity. The second act shows a renaissance that takes place one thousand years after the first act. Racial hybridity has spread throughout the world, and the philosopher has been reincarnated as Saturnino. He proclaims that humanity will finally transcend the body by refraining from reproduction. Outside of a few “mujeres feas,” everyone eventually agrees to Saturnino’s philosophy. In the final act Satanás, Prometeo, and Saturnino reunite years later in the Himalayas. The aging philosopher, now a hermit, is one of only three human beings left on earth. He awaits a signal from the other two—who live in America and Africa—via a contraption of bells on strings. None come; he concludes that the human spirit has progressed beyond the physical plane, and he dies. As soon as the philosopher falls to the ground, a “stupid” man dressed in a kangaroo skin enters the stage,

stating that he is the child of the “ugly” women who refused to renounce reproduction. They established a secret community, and used a synthetic mist to evade Saturnino’s high-tech devices that had searched the globe for human life. Dismayed at Saturnino’s failure, Satanás decides to go among the people once again.

By reading this play we can consider how the theatre contributed to conversations of *mexicanidad* after—and, due to the play’s uncertain publication date, perhaps even during the Revolution.<sup>33</sup> Ana María Introna argues that three of Vasconcelos’s principle concerns in writing this play were to end European imperialism in Latin America, to signal ancient Greece and India as new historical models for the region to follow, and, perhaps most importantly, to advocate for a Messianic cultural figure (103-04; Scarano 141). To a far greater degree than *La raza cósmica*, this earlier work explicitly engages posthumanity, science, and technology as natural components of his racial ideal. The narrative is ultimately utopian, but the perfection of humanity occurs only after scientific and technological advances. Ironically, the fact that *Prometeo vencedor* has yet to find its way to the stage reflects its treatment of technology; given the inventions that the playwright imagines—and certain elements, like the sudden materialization of bodies on the stage—the play would have been technically infeasible to stage when it was written. Of course, most plays require a degree of suspension of disbelief from their audience, so a director could conceivably stage the play and adapt the unperformable elements to something doable. Even so, due to the key discursive role of these unperformable elements in the development of the play, it becomes clear that Vasconcelos viewed his playscript first and foremost as a text. It is for this reason that Townsend refers to the play as a “closet drama,” or a playscript that is “unsuitable for any actually existing stage” (45; 45-47). This obscure classification, coupled with its position in the dustbins of history, strikes readers of *Prometeo*

*vencedor* with the impression that they are viewing at an unfinished work of art.

The playscript's juxtaposition of bodies with scientific (physical) and religious (metaphysical) discourses reminds us that any change to the body ultimately modifies the spirit. Indeed, it is Vasconcelos's obsession with aesthetically improving the human body that informs his decision to include religious characters in his play. Thus *Prometeo vencedor*, beyond a simple philosophical treatise, also becomes an interesting example of an unperformable Latin American *auto*. L. Howard Quackenbush extends the definition of the *auto* far beyond that of the Sacramental Act when he argues that many types of theatre that touch on Christian themes and characters—even those that some may deem as “sacrilegious”—are *autos* (14-17). He goes on to assert that one of the defining elements of the *auto* is the presence of a miracle (11). *Prometeo vencedor* fits both of these descriptions. But the miracle of Vasconcelos's play does not stem from a mystical communion with God; the work seems quite suspicious of god-figures. Instead, this miracle comes from a philosopher's ability to inspire humanity to better itself first through racial hybridity and later by overcoming instinctual desires and transcending its body. The redemptive, eugenic *mestizaje* that spreads across the world replaces the more traditional divine miracle of the *auto*. This in turn suggests that enlightened, philosophical leaders—rather than God—are the true instigators of (post)human development and the ultimate redemption of humanity.

In a sense, the entire play is an allegory for the whole of human history; the prologue—which is a narrative essay that is not even implicitly performed—tells of a protohumanity “más vil que los animales” (12). These creatures are doomed to ignorantly travel the earth and acquiesce to those in power until Prometeo arrives and unlocks the secrets of fire, an act that emancipates protohumanity and allows it to become fully human. This beginning resonates

especially soundly within posthuman thought because it de-emphasizes the supposed exceptionalism of *homo sapiens* within world history.<sup>34</sup> Here humanity represents the current evolutionary stage of a specific species at a given point in time, and the possibility of evolving beyond this identity clearly exists. The thinker differs from scientific—although not necessarily positivist or Spencerist—understandings of human evolution in that he ascribes a metaphysical quality to human progression. He makes this especially clear as his protohumans’ redemption occurs after a renegade deity—rather than a (proto)human intellectual or scientist—shares the knowledge of fire with humanity’s ancestors. This fact deconstructs any rigid understandings of the physical and metaphysical realms as both are shown interacting to forge a single humanity—and later posthumanity—together. Within this framework racial “improvements” will not produce a “cosmic” posthumanity *per se*; instead, they represent ever-improving articulations of humanity that will eventually lead to the superation of the body and the creation of a posthuman spirituality.

The fact that Vasconcelos turns traditional religious antagonists—particularly Satanás, but also Prometeo—into his play’s protagonists alludes to the revolutionary nature of his redemptive, racial ideology. Just as these characters subvert their god’s notion of the status quo, the play’s advocacy of racial hybridity grates against global discourses of white supremacy and Mexican and Latin American marginalization. The juxtaposition of these representatives of traditionally unpositivistic ways of knowing with scientific, posthuman discourses is key to uncovering the nuances in Vasconcelos’s ideology. Rather than view science and metaphysics as distinctive, incommensurate ways of knowing, Vasconcelos attempts to reconcile both. Prometeo’s power comes not from his desire to defy Zeus, but from his act of sharing scientific knowledge with—and thus beautifying—a damned protohuman race. Science has become a

means for intelligent bodies to undergo metaphysical changes that advance them first from the protohuman stage to humanity, and later through humanity and into posthumanity. Thus science loses its supposed objectivity as it becomes a key player in the playwright's ideologically charged race revolution.

Satanás is perhaps more difficult to place as a hero of scientific discourse; he generally plays the role of the sarcastic naysayer who draws attention to the contradictions coming from those in power. Although both (anti)deistic protagonists employ distinct discursive strategies, their mutual dependence on each other turns them into "intimate accomplices" (Townsend 55). Satanás seeks Prometeo because both have stood against their respective deities (Zeus and Jehová)—Satanás by signaling their metaphysical shortcomings, and Prometeo by disobeying a direct command.<sup>35</sup> Satanás views their resistance against their god(s) as "esta rebelión milenaria de los de abajo contra los de arriba, de los oprimidos contra los opresores" (25). By overcoming Jehová and Zeus, Satanás and Prometeo nod toward a racial discourse that is both anti-Semitic (Satanás has defeated the Jewish god) and even anti-European to a degree.<sup>36</sup> This is not to say that these aforementioned groups, particularly the Greeks, have not made valuable contributions to society; instead it signals that humanity has progressed from those previous moments toward its current condition. Together the unholy duo continues to intervene in human affairs; Prometeo continues to bring enlightenment while Satanás uncovers the faults in each philosophy he discovers.

Despite their love of justice, both Prometeo and Satanás espouse racially-charged views that unconsciously perpetuate racist ideologies. This is particularly true regarding the treatment of the Amerindian.<sup>37</sup> We see an allusion to the role of indigenous Mexico in the negative space of the first act of this play, where Satanás and Prometeo discuss religious figures from the Greek,

Jewish, and Christian traditions. At no place do they mention Quetzalcoatl, huitzilophochtli, or any other Amerindian gods; apparently pre-Colombian religious history does not merit discussion. The ramifications of this fact are telling: if Satanás has spent his entire life undermining unjust religious orders without ever confronting an indigenous deity, then Amerindians must be somehow less human than their European counterparts. Furthermore, indigenous traditions cannot constitute Mexican (or Latin American) history, so the nation (and region) must be culturally European but racially hybrid.<sup>38</sup> Unlike the *indigenista* artists and intellectuals who reified the indigenous past but viewed the contemporary Amerindian as an obstacle to progress (a phenomenon I discuss in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3), Vasconcelos simply erases the history of his country's native population, or—as in the case of *La raza cósmica*—he subordinates it to Europe by affirming that ancient America was the site of Atlantis. Throughout the entire first act of *Prometeo vencedor*, the reader awaits any mention of indigenous Mexico, but the closest that we ever come is when the recently deceased Latin American philosopher proclaims his doctrine of racial mixing. Of course, this man's focus is on *mestizaje*—and not on indigenous or Afro-Mexican identities—so even this allusion is only roundabout.

The philosopher's entrance is especially strange, and it constitutes one of the more unstageable aspects of the play; the stage directions state that several strange vibrations interrupt Prometeo and Satanás as they speak, and then, “Aparece una sombra que primero es muy tenue y después se aclara hasta que sus contornos se precisan y se confunden con los de un hombre en traje común” (40). This entrance imbues the philosopher with a supernatural aura that would be difficult to reproduce if the play were staged (Townsend 56-57). The deceased philosopher has much in common with Vasconcelos himself;<sup>39</sup> both the playwright and this character share a

racial ideology that will ultimately subordinate all races to the “Spanish mold” (41), which in practice means that they will impose European culture on different peoples. Indeed, both the philosopher and Saturnino are fictitious representations of the person that Vasconcelos wishes to become. The philosopher’s juxtaposition alongside Prometeo and Satanás imbues this character with a messianic glow. Unlike these other protagonists who represent the fallen angels of their societies, the philosopher—and his reincarnated form as Saturnino—is a redemptive combination of the Socratic philosopher and the Christological savior. Saturnino’s reincarnation (or resurrection) is perhaps the greatest similarity between himself and Jesus, yet his resurrected form is that of a classical Greek philosopher who also has ties to Latin American *mestizaje* and even Hinduism. The character’s salvatory potential comes out especially clearly as we compare him to Prometeo—another figure from ancient Greece—who showed protohumanity the light (literally) through his introduction of fire. The philosopher outdoes Prometeo as he aesthetically perfects the humanity that Prometeo catalyzed. Later, reincarnated as Saturnino, this same soul brings about the superation of the body by initiating a truly posthuman, and even post-corporeal consciousness. Prometeo may have redeemed the protohuman, but it is Saturnino who completes the process by bringing about a spiritual posthumanity.

The deceased philosopher expresses his redemptive racial theory in the form of a classical Greek dialectic as he fields and responds to questions from both Prometeo and Satanás. Prometeo soon recognizes this man as a kindred spirit, but the ever-critical Satanás doubts the potential of Latin America to redeem the world as he points out the region’s problems—particularly its dictatorships. The philosopher agrees that Latin America’s problems are many, but he affirms, “si lo que allí resulta no es mejor que todo lo que se ha visto antes, entonces la Humanidad no tiene remedio y debe perder la esperanza” (41). Of course, in the end we realize

that the final redemption of “humanity” comes through its erasure and the superation of the body. Because Vasconcelos views the redemption of humanity as the result of overcoming the body, critics should view his work from a posthuman—rather than solely humanistic—vantage point. The writer’s goal is to take humanity beyond current articulations of itself and bring about something new, even if that means the end of the human race as currently constituted. That Satanás cannot dissuade the philosopher—and indeed the fact that he ultimately is converted to the cause as well—suggests that *mestizaje* truly is the way to redeem not only Mexico and Latin America, but the world as a whole. The discursive punch of this segment is especially powerful; Satanás has defeated Jehová, humbled Jesus, and been a thorn in the side of all those who hold power—religious, political, philosophical, or otherwise—for millennia. Yet even he cannot find any unresolvable faults with the philosopher’s notion of *mestizaje*, or, later, Saturnino’s goal of transcending the body. Viewed in its totality, Satanás’s endorsement of racial hybridity becomes one of Vasconcelos’s strongest arguments for his racial ideal.

The play presents *mestizaje* as a transcendental force not only because it combines scientific notions of development—and even race—with metaphysical and politico-philosophical ideologies, but also because it entails anti-imperialist sentiments.<sup>40</sup> Despite the political turmoil in Latin America (particularly the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath), the philosopher asserts that, at the very least, the region enjoys racial unity. As such, it is immune—at least in the eyes of the philosopher—to the vice of imperial greed, which has led to World War I in Europe.<sup>41</sup> Just as Vasconcelos argues in *La raza cósmica* that his mixed-race utopia will begin in Latin America before extending across the globe, *Prometeo vencedor* shows this movement beginning in Mexico. The play’s ending in the Himalayas both metaphorically expresses *mestizaje*’s global reach and nods toward the Hindu mysticism that greatly influenced the playwright’s thought



(Jaén xxi). Luis Garrido asserts that, for Vasconcelos, “hay tres géneros de existencias: átomo, organismo y conciencia, o sea dinámicas que se orientan en forma hacia lo divino” (75). In transcending the body, Saturnino and his disciples graduate to the consciousness stage, and in this way they, themselves, become divine. Satanás cannot disagree with the philosopher’s vision as he sees it carried out to this post-organismal extreme; racial hybridity seems to have transcended the carnal desires that have historically led to imperialism, war, and reproduction.

The way in which Vasconcelos’s (imagined) actors embody *mestizo* subjects on the (imagined) stage elucidates some of the more confusing aspects of his cosmic race that no criticism has been able to fully reconcile or explain. For example, *La raza cósmica* posits four historical racial moments, and *mestizaje* appears as a new fifth race (Vasconcelos, *Raza* 33). As such, most of the criticism seems to identify *mestizaje* as Vasconcelos’s fetishized “raza cósmica” (Lewis 179; Bowker 39; Pérez-Torres 6; Hedrick 20; Ocampo López 156). This association makes sense; the thinker discusses his fifth race’s aesthetic taste moments before asserting that the cosmic race will be born in America. As such, there is a clear relationship between the cosmic race and racial hybridity. However, in the prologue of his essay, Vasconcelos claims to have named his text *La raza cósmica* because he lacked a more fitting title (xv). This suggests that the final race exists beyond *mestizaje*—which was a term that existed long before he wrote the essay. Viewed in this light, racial hybridity is a necessary step toward achieving a sixth race that will succeed even the mixed-race peoples of the world. This interpretation seems especially appropriate in *Prometeo vencedor*, where Saturnino attempts to create his “raza celeste” by ending the process of human reproduction (77). Here the cosmic/celestial race has no body; rather it is the posthuman entity that emerges as mixed-race people transcend their bodies through sexual renunciation. If the cosmic race exists beyond

*mestizaje*, then it is little more than an idea in embryonic form at the time of Vasconcelos's writing, and it will not come to fruition during his life. Similar to the deceased philosopher in the first act of his play, all the playwright can do is take solace in the fact that he has prepared the world to move toward cosmic status by disseminating the ideology of official *mestizaje* and anti-imperialism. Later generations will have to take up his mantle and carry his work to its triumphant conclusion.

The play shows *mestizaje* as a great physical and spiritual improvement to humanity, but racial hybridity ultimately remains within the human sphere. The second act, which is set one thousand years after the first, shows an established *mestizo* society that has spread across the world. Townsend tells us that Vasconcelos recognized that the transitional period—or “political stage” in which major *letrados* imposed *mestizaje* upon the masses—could be “messy,” so he decided to take his (reading) audience well into the future, long after the resolution of any such conflicts (57). Unlike the first and third acts, which take place in mountainous regions, this section of the play is set in a prairie with a purple sky and numerous marble benches. Townsend asserts that this domestication of outdoor space is especially noteworthy because indigenous subjects were frequently equated with nature (58). Apparently, the place of Mexican (and world) Amerindians is to be domesticated and incorporated into a European-style world that upholds Vasconcelian norms of aesthetics.

This scene represents a singular moment in Vasconcelos's writing because it is here that he gives his fifth race a body. The most interesting aspect of this representation is its surprisingly heavy focus on gender and sexuality. Countless *ninfas* populate the stage, and shortly after the act begins, they call attention to their beauty and emphasize their claims to whiteness. Townsend asserts that due to this scene, “readers of *La raza cósmica* can spare themselves the trouble of

proving that *mestizaje* is really a code word for whitening” (59). However, the text complicates her assertion as the *ninfas* seductively invite Prometeo to frolic with them in following manner:

Somos blancas como el más limpio mármol, y al soltar los cabellos parece que un lampo de sol nos baña la espalda. Son nuestros labios rojas heridas donde la vida arde con ansiedades de brasa. [. . .]

Otras somos blancas, con tinte azulado, más blanco que el de la rubia y más incitante; en nuestros labios hay la pasión que crea los infiernos y un licor que turba y no sacia. Las madejas de nuestros cabellos son como serpientes voluptuosas.

A otras nos ha bruñido el sol con sus rayos de oro, y abrigamos la potencia fina y profunda que alimenta las pasiones largas. (47)

This is hardly the discourse of a purely “whitened” society; the *ninfas* celebrate racial complexion(s) that endow them with a seductive, mixed-race exoticism. This orientalization of the *mestiza ninfas* moves beyond Eurocentric notions of white and exotic femininity. Indeed, these women represent a new racial conjugation that would set them apart from twentieth century people of any race. This is especially obvious with the bluish women, who—beyond clear ties to *modernista* discourse—serve as obvious metaphors for the aesthetic possibilities of racial mixing.

The focus on female sexuality is telling here; the playwright represents his *mestizas* by appealing to ancient Greek mythology, which held *ninfas* to be minor gods. While not yet “cosmic,” they bear the incremental physical and genetic improvements that are necessary to ultimately transcend the body. The *ninfas* are neither quasi-divine, posthuman subjects nor twentieth century humans, although their genealogy ultimately ties them more closely to

humanity than to the utopian posthumanity of Saturnino's "raza celeste." Unlike the half-gods of Greek mythology, Vasconcelos's *ninfas*' superior physical bodies result not from a divine sire, but from the synergetic, interracial fusion of inferior progenitors. Their humanity rings clear as the play emphasizes their sexuality, which is a highly embodied act that a practicing Catholic such as Vasconcelos would probably not have equated with divinity or godliness.<sup>42</sup> The *ninfas*' articulation of an advanced humanity underscores the fact that Vasconcelos views beauty, education, and interracial sexual union as components of the same eugenic equation. After pursuing these aforementioned ideals for a millennium, his fictitious society has managed to transcend almost all barriers to human progress. This play, then, advocates a very real racial hybridity in which white bodies are darkened and dark bodies are whitened. Once again, the fact that everything must fit within European intellectual and cultural traditions suggests a degree of cultural—but certainly not phenotypic—whitening that was inherent to the Mexican brand of official *mestizaje* in general.

The *ninfas*' seductive quality is especially interesting when juxtaposed with Saturnino, who descends from a plane and enters the stage to further the aesthetic perfection of humanity. *Mestizaje* and interracial sexual unity are necessary to human development in Vasconcelos's mind, but Saturnino's work underscores the fact that mixed-race identity—like every racial era within Vasconcelian thought—is transitory. Aesthetic eugenics have created a body so perfect that humankind can finally move beyond the physical. The *ninfas* come to represent both the allure and the vices of *mestizo* identity; by actively attaining and flaunting their sexuality, they emphasize the inherently sexual nature of mixed-race eugenics, which in turn focuses their identity on their bodies. Their seductive potential suggests that they are aesthetically "superior" to their ancestors of all races, but this superiority paradoxically comes as heterosexual males—

who must now resist their sexual urges—objectify their “exotic” beauty. The *ninfas* never attain true subjectivity; despite their great desirability, they do not engage in meaningful discussions, and for the most part they remain in the chorus in the background. Somewhat paradoxically, then, these women’s status as objects signals them as the crown jewels of the thousand-year-old *mestizo* project while at the same time their seductive qualities position them as serious threats.

As long as the *ninfas* are objects without agency, Saturnino can neutralize their subversive potential by instilling values of celibacy in his male disciples. The true danger to his utopia emerges when women become active subjects who deliberately reject the interests of the *mestizo* patriarchy. The playwright emphasizes this through the “*mujeres feas*,” who, unlike the *ninfas*, are not supposed to win the affection of a heterosexual, male audience. Their ugliness makes them indifferent to Saturnino’s aesthetics and leads them to resist his philosophies outright. As the first act ends, they enter the stage and argue with the philosopher, telling him that they wish to bear children, but Saturnino retorts that they will never find any man willing to procreate with them. Townshend notes a comedic aspect to this back and forth (60); however, the fact that such a conversation produces humor testifies to a cultural referent that objectifies female voices and actors. This male chauvevenism takes on a racial dimension as it draws attention to these women’s apparent ugliness, a trait that Vasconcelos racializes throughout his *oeuvre*. In *La raza cósmica* he states, “El mundo así está lleno de fealdad a causa de nuestros vicios, nuestros prejuicios y nuestra miseria” (26). Given his thesis on racial hybridity and the fact that (Europeanized) education will cure the people of their aesthetic shortcomings,<sup>43</sup> this quote clearly equates ugliness with indigeneity (Spitta 334; Marentes 96). The fact that the state can educate such ugliness away also suggests that this “fealdad” is performative in nature, and a robust education can modify indigenous performativity and incorporate Amerindians into the

body politic.

Much of the criticism regarding Vasconcelos's racial thought focuses on his aim of incorporating indigenous Mexicans into the *mestizo* state (Lund, *Mestizo* 24; Ocampo López 146-56). These studies certainly show us a great deal about post-revolutionary Mexico, but I concur with Sánchez Prado when he argues:

Esta fue la función que, a pesar de su problemática articulación de la raza y de sus coqueteos con el fascismo, *La raza cósmica* jugó en el siglo XX: una forma de teorizar la resistencia a las colonizaciones que han aquejado la historia del continente. Este sentido preciso es el que se pierde cuando se identifica el mestizaje como simple articulación del estado liberal mexicano y latino-americano.<sup>44</sup> (“Mestizaje” 390-91)

Vasconcelos's dream of incorporating his nation's indigenes sprang primarily from his desire for Mexico's self-determination and modernization through a home-grown path. My reading of *Prometeo vencedor* extends Sánchez Prado's observations by showing how race colors even Vasconcelos's anti-imperialism. Similar to what we see in the *letrado*'s seminal essay, ugliness results from a lack of education and a break from the “Spanish mold.” But the playwright codes the “mujeres feas” as Anglo-Saxon by signaling their ties to Australia—a fact that contradicts many studies that argue that Vasconcelos saw (only) the indigenous and black components of pre-*mestizo* Mexico and Latin America as “ugly.”<sup>45</sup> Not only do these women disassociate themselves from *mestizaje*, but they also favor the less refined British—rather than Spanish—European tradition.

The ugly women's racial coding is not too surprising, especially as we consider that Vasconcelos believed that Anglo-Saxons and Latins (Iberians) had different racial missions

(*Raza* 18). Leopoldo Zea observes that Vasconcelos imagined two Americas—one Iberian, the other British—in tension with one another (*Utopía* 30).<sup>46</sup> The textual aspects of *Prometeo vencedor* both support and qualify this assertion as they place Anglo and Iberian cultures in an antagonistic relationship on the world—rather than merely regional—stage. Because he never expected to stage the play, Vasconcelos turns to aspects like his characters’ speech to signal them as hideous and other. Just as Vasconcelos argues that indigenous “fealdad” comes from a lack of knowledge in *La raza cósmica*, the ugly women show no respect for classical philosophy, and opt instead for pragmatism.<sup>47</sup> In response to Saturnino, who has told them that they are too ugly to seduce any men, they reply “¡buscaremos centauros!” (68). Their invocation of a human/animal hybrid in response to Saturnino’s doctrine of celibacy underscores that these women do not rationally articulate their decision; instead, they turn to basic animal desires—within the framework of the play—that inform their understandings of happiness. This shortsightedness results from a lack of cultural refinement that makes them unable to accept, or even understand, Saturnino’s teachings. That they refuse to bring about an immaterial (post)humanity underscores how these Anglo-Saxons’ lack of education speaks to a deeper, spiritual deficit *vis a vis* their mixed-race counterparts. Indeed, they eschew the decidedly Catholic (read: Latin American) values of self-renunciation and celibacy—at least within the clergy—and opt for a more protestant (read: Anglo-Saxon) sexual morality in which all people—including religious/philosophical leaders—should aspire to procreate a new generation.<sup>48</sup>

These facts corroborate the numerous studies that place Vasconcelos’s thought within the tradition of early twentieth century Latin Americanism (Sánchez Prado, “Mestizaje” 381-97; Introna 97-125; Posada 379-81; Real de Azúa 23; Zea, *Precursores* 118). As such, it is not surprising that *Prometeo vencedor* dialogues almost seamlessly with the work of José Enrique

Rodó, who “admired” North American (read: New World Anglo-Saxon) pragmatism’s ability to revolutionize and modernize the United States (51), but who also asserted the country’s moral bankruptcy due to rampant utilitarianism (46-50). Rodó’s solution is inward meditation and a reading of the classics as the best way to withstand the temptations of Yankee materialism (9-30). Similar to Rodó, Vasconcelos asserts that a greater Iberian spirituality will ultimately favor the Latin “race” over the Anglo-Saxon (Villegas, *Filosofía* 93). The confrontation between Saturnino and the “feas” in *Prometeo vencedor* plays Rodó’s dichotomy out in dialectic space, and although the women ultimately frustrate Saturnino’s plans to move humanity beyond the body, they do so in a way that validates Saturnino’s thought, and not their own. Similar to the uneducated Amerindians of *La raza cósmica*, these women are ugly due to their (performative) ignorance. This fact further problematizes Townshend’s assertion that a reading of *Prometeo vencedor* proves that Vasconcelos simply saw *mestizaje* as racial whitening. Indeed, the presence of these women on the stage suggests quite the opposite. Their gender, coupled with their ties to Anglo-Saxon identity (and hence whiteness), are the driving force behind their opposition to Saturnino’s aesthetic eugenics. Vasconcelos’s *mestizaje* was both patriarchal and racially hybrid; certainly, he favored European cultural forms over the indigenous, but white people who refused to contribute their genes to a mixed-race future also posed a serious threat to his *mestizo* utopia. Spanish American *criollos* generally did not worry the thinker, but Anglo-Saxon nations posed a great threat in large part because they tended to despise miscegenation.

Anglo-Saxon ambivalence regarding—or even resistance to—racial hybridity was one of the greatest injustices that Vasconcelos tried to counterract throughout his life (Vasconcelos, “Racial Problem” 98-99; Stavans 26-28; Jaén xix). Anti-*mestizo* ideologies within the US particularly threatened racially mixed countries like Mexico. Vasconcelos’s attempts to



philosophically subvert the suppositions that justified his country's continued marginalization should challenge twenty-first century scholars to reevaluate his work now that nearly a century has passed since he penned both *Prometeo vencedor* and *La raza cósmica*. Clearly, he stood at the fore of the anti-imperialist projects that opposed US incursions into Latin American politics and territories. One key way for him to do this was by theorizing, and validating, an authentically Mexican and Latin American identity that could pose as a counterweight to US hegemony. Gabriella De Beer detracts from this understanding a bit as she argues that Vasconcelos saw US (Anglo-Saxon) and Mexican (Latin American) cultures as two opposing articulations of humanity that, when joined, "would form a solid basis for a bright future" (275). Her argument seems out of place in *Prometeo vencedor*, where the bull-headed Anglo-Saxon refusal to accept Saturnino's proposal threatens not only Australia, but all of humanity.

### **The Role of Technology in the Vasconcelian Utopia**

Technology becomes key to overcoming this Australian affront to Saturnino's aesthetics in that it provides him the ability to monitor the world population and ensure that his doctrine spreads across the globe. If we define science as positivism—or even the evocation of generally-accepted paradigms in the vein of Thomas S. Kuhn—then it receives no mention in the play. This lack of any reference to the hard sciences, however, does not preclude the Mexican philosopher from theorizing the role of technology—which is one of the most obvious fruits of science for people outside of scientific communities—in his *mestizo* utopia. Regarding the role of science in the playwright's work, Villegas states, "Vasconcelos [. . .] la postula como tránsito de salvación, como la revivencia del universo entero" (*Filosofía* 83). We should recognize that Vasconcelos uses the term "science" to mean knowledge of all sorts, and that aesthetics

represents the greatest of the sciences for him (Villegas, *Filosofía* 83). However, this very fact suggests that for Vasconcelos the physical sciences must ultimately become an aesthetic tool whose laws adhere to—and even revive—Westernized standards of beauty. As such, the end goal of science, far from producing “objective” fact, is the imposition of a supposedly self-evident, greater (post)humanity.

When Prometeo and Satanás arrive at Saturnino’s Himalayan home at the beginning of the third act, they find him surrounded by strange apparatuses that signal his technological sophistication (70).<sup>49</sup> The philosopher explains that he and his disciples utilized their specialized gadgets to determine that there were no more living humans on the planet. The implication here is that, if he would have found people somewhere, both he and his disciples would have approached them and preached the gospel of self-renunciation and abnegation. Technology, then, becomes a tool that helps *letrado* figures to impose their ideology on the masses. It aids Saturnino in imposing his posthuman superation of the body on the world by seeking out those people who either oppose or have not yet heard his ideas. Thus technology becomes an example of a “repressive state apparatus” (RSA) in the Althusserian sense in that it physically coerces people to renounce reproduction (144-48).<sup>50</sup> Technology and science are not the end goal of Saturnino’s utopia; rather, they represent the means through which Saturnino can achieve his dream of imposing a glorious posthumanity on the world. The philosopher has not abandoned his aesthetic and political ideals for science; rather, he has incorporated this discourse into his message. He never reifies positivism, but he does rely on technological advancements to impose his fetishized (post)human identity on the globe.

Saturnino’s coercive doctrine of corporeal superation underscores one of the central tenets to the playwright’s thought, at least as represented in *Prometeo vencedor*: human

evolution, beyond morally ambivalent natural selection, represents a quantifiable improvement to the species. In order to ensure redemptive—rather than random—evolution, *letrado* figures like Saturnino (or Vasconcelos himself) must advocate eugenics. Although Vasconcelos distances his eugenics from positivist, and even scientific, discourses by emphasizing aesthetics rather than biology (*La raza* 33-34), any manipulation of the human genome necessarily has biological repercussions. Science exists in the Mexican *letrado*'s thought as a method and discourse of power that can aesthetically shape human heredity and create a utopic, even posthuman, existence. This is especially true in *Prometeo vencedor*, where Saturnino utilizes science and technology for coercion and surveillance. Vasconcelos advocates racial miscegenation as the primary vehicle for his success, but he recognizes that it will be difficult to govern people's sexuality without the help of ultra-modern, science fictionesque devices that track human activities throughout the world. Science still remains in the background of this play as another "over there," but the emphasis on both technology and (forced) racial hybridity pulls the playwright's thoughts on science into focus far more convincingly than does his essay. Indeed, science, beyond a disinterested process of falsifiable observation, obtains a redemptive value akin to that of religion. It is only through technology that humanity can achieve metaphysical and aesthetic perfection.

As metaphysics becomes the favored way of knowing, *mestizo* science improves beyond even that of imperializing forces. The first major—and probably unperformable—*mestizo* use of technology occurs during the second act when Saturnino arrives on the stage in his airplane. Given that the first airplanes successfully flew in 1903, less than two decades before Vasconcelos would publish his play, this grand entrance represents the pinnacle of the technology of the day. What is more, the "ugly women" do not enter on any comparable

machine, so we can also assert that Saturnino's entrance places him ahead of Anglo-Saxon culture both philosophically and technologically/scientifically. This racialization of technological privilege reflects Vasconcelos's belief—which would later become the official view of the post-revolutionary state (Lund, *Mestizo* xi)—of mixed-race identity as the (aesthetic) key to Mexican, and even world, modernity. People of other races remain on the margin as Saturnino proclaims the means by which he can advance the collective human consciousness beyond even *mestizaje*. At this point it becomes clear that primitive people—coded as Anglo-Saxons in this case—are not privy to the same technologies as Saturnino and his disciples.

One of Saturnino's most interesting apparatuses is the contraption of bells on strings that connects people across continents and allows for instantaneous—albeit limited—communication. Viewed from a twenty-first century vantage point, the most provocative aspect of this technology is its very literal embodiment of a world wide web (analog instead of digital) that brings bodies together across great distances. This alienation of information from the (human) body places his *mestizo* society in a posthuman, even cyborg, context (Hayles, *Posthuman* 2). Only after creating—and utilizing—technologies that make a physical body's presence unnecessary for communication can Saturnino enforce his anti-reproductive policy and the resulting elimination of the human body from the planet. That said, similar to N. Katherine Hayles, who constantly posits the body's central role to human experience even in light of technological developments ("Combining" 226), Vasconcelos shows how technology ultimately cannot completely displace the body's centrality to the (post)human experience. The play's technologies—both those that Vasconcelos explicitly codes in the stage directions and those that the director (or reader) has to imagine and choreograph—ultimately have very clear physical bodies that depend on, yet move beyond, the human.

Saturnino's web of bells only works after someone rings his bell, which then vibrates the string and (physically) carries the signal to the person on the other end. This nightly, ritual communication with other people becomes the event around which the idealist hermit schedules his life. When no signal comes, he realizes that he is the last living human and joyfully proclaims that the souls of the former humanity "va[n] a celebrar su divorcio definitivo del mundo físico, para irse, ya libre, a los espacios eternos" (79). This celebratory speech effectively places Vasconcelos's cosmic (or celestial) race within the posthuman sphere. It also draws attention to the need for human bodies to interact with technology in order to bring about and announce this transition. If Saturnino's "aparatos" had not already scoured the earth without finding any trace of humanity (74), and if there were no means for the last of Saturnino's disciples to communicate instantaneously across continents with one another, it would be impossible to coordinate an effort as massive as the superation of the human body.

Thus technology, far from representing one more appendage of a utopian, futuristic society, lies at the heart of Saturnino's endeavors; indeed, it has permeated his work at all levels. Whether it is Saturnino's commanding presence after his entrance on an airplane, his bells on strings, or the apparatuses that do not detect any human life, technology—and its ensuing relationship with the body—both validates the discourse of *mestizaje* and imposes it on the world. Saturnino's dependence on technology makes him one of the earliest incarnations of the cyborg in post-revolutionary—and twentieth century—Mexico. This identity comes from his juxtaposition with, and dependence on, technology in order to carry out his functions. The fact that Vasconcelos would imagine a cyborg protagonist as the natural subject to transform humanity into a "raza celeste,"<sup>51</sup> emphasizes the key role that he ascribes to science, even if he distances himself from the *científicos*—who were, of course, not really scientists—of the

Porfiriato. For Vasconcelos, an enlightened society must mature scientifically and technologically, but this should never come at the expense of philosophy. As Minister of Education, Vasconcelos felt that it was his duty to impart both philosophical and scientific knowledge to the masses (Ocampo 148). *Prometeo vencedor* is especially interesting, then, because it is here that we see the first inklings of this intellectual combination of metaphysics, the body, science, and technology within his thought.

Of course, the appearance of the “stupid” Australian shortly after Saturnino’s death complicates this reading and poses serious questions about the feasibility of using technology to forcefully lead humanity toward aesthetic progress. When he first arrives on the stage, the Australian explains how his—and other people’s—mother evaded Saturnino’s coercive teachings when he states:

Nuestras madres lograron seducir a unos cuantos de los que éste [Saturnino] engañaba y con ellos se fueron a vivir ocultamente, a la región más fea y apartada del mundo; por las selvas del interior de la Australia. Allí fundaron un país y lo rodearon de una especie de niebla artificial que lo hacía invisible a los anteojos y aparatos de Saturnino. [. . .] Los hombres decían a menudo que aquello era horrible y se sentían asqueados, añoraban a Saturnino; pero todas las renegadas se mostraban felices. (83)

Saturnino’s failure to impose his utopian goals on these dissidents—in spite of all of his technology—provides one of the most tantalizing puzzles of the entire work. What should we make of this surprise ending that apparently undermines the playwright’s entire racial ideal? The obvious answer would be to determine what went wrong, but Vasconcelos never provides a satisfying explanation as to how these caveman-like subjects evaded detection. As such, readers

of the playscript must interpret the text based on the few clues he provides.

There are two possible explanations for Saturnino's remarkable failure, both with their accompanying significance. On the one hand, perhaps the Australian is correct in asserting that these women's ability to conjure a mist truly did shield them from Saturnino's devices, thus allowing the matriarchal society to grow under his nose. On the other hand, perhaps the philosopher king's machines detected this Australian civilization but did not register its inhabitants as human. The first explanation evokes the highly gendered division of nature (feminine) and technology (masculine) that persisted even within the academy at least until Donna Haraway proclaimed cyborg feminism in the 1980s (Lykke 74-87). If the "mujeres feas" have the ability to circumvent technology, then they represent a subversive threat by virtue of their gender. The latter possibility suggests that technology can (and did) distinguish the human from the nonhuman, which would in turn imbue science with the interpellatory role of designating bodies as either savable or lost to perdition. Ultimately, given Vasconcelos's focus on the metaphysical rather than the technical, it is likely that both of these factors contribute to the Australian society's successful hiding.

One key to this Australian matriarchy is the women's ability to use their ties to nature to undermine Saturnino's technology, a fact that fits within the author's gendered understanding of *mestizaje* in general. We have already seen that the "feminine" values of motherhood—rather than "masculine" traits of sexual self-gratification—pose the greatest obstacle to his doctrine of self-resignation and the end of procreation. This fact suggests that Vasconcelos views femininity as essentialistically incommensurable with the masculine experience, despite the fact that he favored a more liberated femininity than most Mexican men of his time (Franco, *Plotting Women* 103). Within this argument, the fissures between these oppositionally gendered modes of

experiencing humanity allow the “*mujeres feas*” to outwit technology by evoking nature.

Saturnino’s machines are incapable of seeing through the feminine mists because they are only programmed to operate within the patriarchy, so feminine nature becomes a blind spot. Just as their “innate” (read: natural) maternal instincts lead them to challenge Saturnino’s philosophy of the body, their association with the elements undermines his ability to enforce a policy against reproduction because these women can evade his technology. Viewed in this light, Saturnino would have avoided this tragic failure if he had focused more energy on containing these women.

This produces a common denominator between both forced *mestizaje* and Saturnino’s renunciation of the body: both movements must rally women to their respective causes. As Minister of Education, Vasconcelos worked to convince indigenous women to procreate with white and/or mixed-race men. Because he viewed race both culturally and genetically, his demand on (particularly indigenous) women was that they raise children qualitatively different from themselves in a cultural sense. This parallels Saturnino’s requirements of the “*mujeres feas*” in that they must ensure the demise of their own culture by accepting his aesthetics. This predictably leads to resistance that threatens his ability to carry out his posthuman project. The “*mujeres feas*” become subversive figures as Saturnino fails to convert them to his cause—a fact that they emphasize as they effectively kidnap their mates and carry them off to Australia. This narrative supports an imaginary in which seductive, lustful women force men to give in to their sexual urges against their better judgment in a way that harms society. Even when the men realize the error of their ways, they cannot return to Saturnino’s fold. At this point, they are stuck in a matriarchal, Amazonian society from which there is no escape. The greatest tragedy of the ugly women’s seductions, according to the play, is that their sexual union with their partners reproduces children with tenuous ties to humanity.



Given this fact, we may also view the Australians' successful seclusion as a testament against their own humanity. The end of the play shows an apparent evolutionary fork in the road of the homo sapiens species. We have already established that Saturnino and his disciples have transcended their bodies and achieved a posthuman, disembodied consciousness. For his part, the Australian's mannerisms, vocabulary, and especially dress associate him with popular constructions of the caveman, thus suggesting a de-evolution toward protohumanity. This fact reverberates with his work across many titles. Writing on Vasconcelos's thought as represented in *La raza cósmica*, Mónica E. Scarano argues that "la intermisión racial ya iniciada en Hispanoamérica daría lugar—en la utopía de Vasconcelos—a otro mestizaje más complejo: el cultural, verdadera palingenesia para los desalentados espíritus latinos, frente al poderoso movimiento expansivo anglosajón" (142). By the play's third act, the dichotomy of *mestizo*/Anglo-Saxon has continued for over one thousand years, and it has finally reached a breaking point. Viewed in this light, the world has reached a final judgment in which humanity has either been transfigured as it embarks on a new, posthuman path or damned as it reverts to protohumanity. Beyond representing a merely inferior articulation of humanity, the Australians have now de-evolved to the point that neither Prometeo nor Satanás recognizes any human traces in their beings. The secular miracle of this *auto*, then, is the ultimate redemption of the *mestizo* world and the equally dramatic condemnation of what remains of the decadent, post-imperial Anglo-Saxon race.

Technology has served as an arbiter in bringing about this final judgment. It has found those human beings who still needed to hear Saturnino's ideas of corporeal superation, while at the same time ignoring those hominids living in Australia because they are no longer savable, or even human. If we view the play through this lens, not only do we see a harsh criticism against

British and/or US imperialism, but technology becomes the successor to previous deities like Jehová and Zeus—although the indigenous gods are still generally ignored. Prometeo and Satanás have overcome Jehová and Zeus, but neither one feels the need to subvert science or technology. Indeed, both generally agree with the verdict of Australians inhumanity. This is especially odd given that Prometeo sacrificed so much to redeem protohumanity and Satanás has spent his entire life challenging and subverting unjust creeds. Rather than affirm Australian humanity, Satanás and Prometeo decide that they must once again return to earth to facilitate human evolution. This time, however, Satanás—who has been converted to Saturnino's ideologies—will play more than just a satirical role; he will now strive to lead this degenerate protohumanity back to the aesthetic identity that Saturnino and the philosopher have shown him. If there is any hope, it stems from the fact that, similar to the protohumans of the prologue, this latter incarnation will once again progress toward the disembodied, posthuman communion. Perhaps even Satanás and Prometeo will find redemption this time around.

## Conclusion

This chapter has filled a void in the criticism on José Vasconcelos by utilizing posthuman theory to show that the writer imagined a scientific discourse that adhered to strict metaphysical guidelines. Equally informative, my reading of his racial theories corroborates and further explains the triumphant discourse he associates with ongoing human evolution and progression. The Mexican philosopher most certainly saw *mestizaje* as a political strategy, but he also saw it as the most perfect articulation of humanity heretofore created. In the end, Vasconcelos's great contribution to Mexican thought was not his opposition to positivism or even his imagination of a utopian cosmic race. Instead, his work is especially useful when viewed as a mythos that

justified the new brand of post-revolutionary nationalism. As the country's most visible *letrado*—with the possible exception of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, or David Alfaro Siqueiros, all of whom he employed as minister of the SEP—the thinker's privileged position afforded him an unparalleled position from which to enunciate his version of Mexican nationalism, complete with its heavy focus on an aesthetic, *mestizo* ideal. The thinker's utopian drive, and his work to modernize Mexico by transforming its citizens into a triumphant fifth race is still felt today nearly a century later.

Whether he was a hero or villain, Prometheus or Satan, Vasconcelos's prominence allowed him to largely define the terms for race relations in post-revolutionary Mexico. Significantly, his was not the decisive voice regarding the final meaning of his work. Even prior to his self-imposed exile from 1924-1929, different factions of Mexican society had incorporated his mixed-race ideal into leftist movements like muralist *indigenismo*, and following his exit, the state continued to allude to his notion of a cosmic race through music, radio, film, and many other media (Velázquez and Vaughan 95-118; Hayes 243-58; Hershfield 259-78). One of the most understudied aspects of these at times contradictory discourses is that, despite serious ideological rifts, almost all of these official representations of *mestizaje* imagined the juxtaposition of the Mexican body with technology at some level. It is doubtful that Vasconcelos catalyzed this focus on technology and the body with his obscure closet drama, but he clearly tapped into a hidden part of the collective Revolutionary and post-revolutionary psyche as he imagined Saturnino's science fictionesque utopia. Vasconcelos was a pioneer in positioning *mestizaje* as an evolutionary advancement; the following chapter will show how his mid-century successor, Emilio "El Indio" Fernández, also juxtaposed scientific discourses with the post-revolutionary racialized and gendered body to assert Mexican modernity and progress.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Skirius notes that Vasconcelos viewed *indigenismo* as an internal threat to the nation (*Cruzada* 21). See also Fabián Acosta Rico, (108-11). Antonio Sacoto (154-60), however, observes several *indigenista* tendencies within the author's work, particularly regarding the idea that the incorporation of indigenous Mexicans into the post-revolutionary state was necessary to perfecting national character (154-60). Unlike Sacoto, I believe that it is more appropriate to view Vasconcelos as a proponent of *mestizaje*, but not of the *indigenista* brand. The thinker obviously aimed to incorporate indigenous Mexicans into the nation, but he always emphasized the European model.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous scholars have written on how the post-revolutionary state used the SEP to successfully promulgate official ideologies to the masses. Alan Knight argues that muralism both forged allegiances and influenced politics (394-98). For her part, Mary Katherine Coffey argues that muralism left palpable results on the masses (11-17). For a brief overview of the numerous SEP projects, see Carlos Monsiváis ("Notas" 345-48).

<sup>3</sup> Marentes shows how Vasconcelos's notion of a "cosmic race" opened itself up for numerous, frequently contradictory articulations. Vasconcelos makes it clear that he subordinates indigenous culture to that of the Spanish conquerors, but other thinkers could just as easily emphasize the pre-Columbian past (60-74).

<sup>4</sup> Fell's entire book, *José Vasconcelos: Los años del águila* is an incredible study that discusses Vasconcelos's cultural missions in great detail. See also Joaquín Cárdenas Noriega (59-99). Here Cárdenas Noriega compiles an impressive annotated bibliography from the time period.

<sup>5</sup> Vasconcelos created numerous political enemies during his time in the government. See Skirius (*Cruzada* 92-109).

<sup>6</sup> Paz qualifies Vasconcelos's influence on the national psyche when he states that, despite impressive insights, he never hit the essence of Mexican being or culture (167).

<sup>7</sup> No solid date exists for the publication of *Prometeo vencedor*. In a 2010 publication of *La raza cósmica*, Editorial Porrúa lists the play's publication date as 1916 (xiii); however, the title page of an early publication of *Indología* dates the play as late as 1921. Numerous other critics assign other dates. For example, Didier T. Jaén dates it at 1917 (xxii). This uncertainty makes it difficult to know whether he wrote it during or after the Revolution, but we can be quite confident that it preceded *La raza cósmica* and that it was published between 1916 and 1921.

<sup>8</sup> Anastacio Sosa Ramos argues that Vasconcelos recognized the importance of science in his education campaigns, but that he also made sure to include philosophical knowledge in his curricula as well (137-40).

<sup>9</sup> I focus primarily on Vasconcelos's treatment of indigenous Mexicans because this was the demographic that most concerned him as he championed *mestizaje*. We should, however, note his ambivalence regarding Afro-Mexican people as well. See Marco Polo Hernández's insightful study for a discussion on Afro-Mexican identity and Vasconcelian *mestizaje* (70-74).

<sup>10</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 deal more in-depth with the internal imperialism of the *mestizo* state.

<sup>11</sup> Positivism as a discourse differed from its political application in that it was at its core a philosophy that, in the words of Leopoldo Zea, "expresa un conjunto de ideas, las cuales, al igual que otros muchos sistemas filosóficos, pretenden o han pretendido poseer un valor universal" (*Positivismo* 15). The principal tenet of positivism was the exaltation of scientific inquiry over other forms of knowledge; however, as Zea notes, this intellectual current became

highly politicized as it favored the dominant classes of the *Porfiriato* (*Positivismo* 26-27).

<sup>12</sup> Garrido asserts that Vasconcelos favors “emotional knowledge,” over science (76-77). See also Ana María Introna (97-99).

<sup>13</sup> Joshua Lund offers a softer interpretation than Hale: “Though not a wholesale repetition of the positivistic *mestizaje* of the nineteenth century, Vasconcelos’s reiteration serves much of the same function: an effective articulation of race and time that helps to reconcile the hegemony of the nation with the sovereignty of the state” (*Impure* 108).

<sup>14</sup> Didier T. Jaén would argue that Vasconcelos’s idea of evolution is clearly not scientific because it occurs through eugenic love, and not any incarnation of natural selection or even survival of the fittest. See Jaén (x-xiii).

<sup>15</sup> Ana María Alonso observes that Mendelian genetics—particularly in plants—greatly affected how Vasconcelos viewed racial hybridity (464). At the same time, Luis A. Marentes notes that “there is no scientific rigor or discipline in [Vasoncelos’s] historical remarks, but he seems to be compelled to frame his discussion in scientific terms” (85).

<sup>16</sup> Hoeg builds on the work of Antonio Benítez Rojo, who asserts an “over there” within Caribbean tradition that can be both repressive and liberating. Whereas Benítez Rojo refers principally to racial identities (290), Hoeg extends the definition to explain science’s problematic role in Vasconcelian thought.

<sup>17</sup> For Hoeg, “nothing could be more rational, more documental, or more modern than the unilinear trajectory toward the perfection of humanity that is science” (76).

<sup>18</sup> Acosta Rico notes that Vasconcelos turns to ancient Greece in an attempt to emphasize his metaphysical preoccupations over the positivistic (22-24). Hernán G. H. Taboada, however, disagrees to an extent, noting that much of Vasconcelos’s aesthetics resulted from his time in

Asia, which was another region with a great *mestizo* tradition. See Taboada (112).

<sup>19</sup> Zum Feld briefly mentions that Vasconcelos included the teaching of science within his curriculum as Minister of Education (429).

<sup>20</sup> Leopoldo Zea places Vasconcelos's work—particularly *La raza cósmica*—within the tradition of Latin American thought that began with Simón Bolívar (“Utopía” 24).

<sup>21</sup> It is this anti-Anglo tendency within *La raza cósmica* that leads Paul Bowker to view it as a “counter-hegemonic retort” (40).

<sup>22</sup> David Sobrevilla considers transculturation and heterogeneity as movements, noting *mestizaje* as a possible precursor to both traditions (23). See Sobrevilla (21-33). J. Jorge Klor de Alva provides a fascinating discussion on *mestizaje* as both a product of imperial discourses and a resistant categorization of race (254-58).

<sup>23</sup> To date, Townsend's dissertation chapter is the only in-depth study of *Prometeo vencedor*.

<sup>24</sup> Monsiváis sees Vasconcelos as a figure who began on the left—he was one of Madero's biggest supporters—but who would ultimately “exalt” fascist regimes following his devastating electoral defeat in 1929 (“Notas” 356). Marco Polo Hernández, however, argues that Vasconcelos espoused “extreme right tendencies” even while writing *La raza cósmica* (65).

<sup>25</sup> The presidential campaign of 1929 wore Vasconcelos down; fearing for his life he bought a gun (Blanco 168). The ordeal—which he believed pitted “civilization” against “barbary” (Blanco 146)—culminated in his loss due to electoral fraud (Sherman 23). For an in-depth biographical look at his presidential run, see José Joaquín Blanco (146-68). For a discussion of his shift to the right, see Blanco (170); Monsiváis (“Notas” 354-56).

<sup>26</sup> Despite his calls for race and gender equality, Vasconcelos felt that boys and girls

should learn different skills in the classroom. Thus he appointed Gabriela Mistral to create a curriculum for women. Her book *Lecturas para mujeres: Destinadas a la enseñanza del lenguaje* became a testament to Vasconcelos's gender-based educational paradigms.

<sup>27</sup> Alonso notes a great deal of common ground between the theories of both Vasconcelos and Gamio. Both viewed *mestizo* identity as an improvement of both white and indigenous racial identities. Both condemned external imperialism, but they hoped to establish internal colonies of the nation's indigenous. See Alonso (466-69). Tace Hedrick notes that the two often worked together, with Gamio becoming undersecretary of the SEP. Their opposing ideas often refined each other's thought. See Hedrick (39-40).

<sup>28</sup> For Thomas S. Kuhn, a "normal science" is practiced within set paradigms, which are basic theories regarding scientific concepts (*Structure* 10-11). While Vasconcelos's writing does not reflect the scientific rigor necessary to be a true paradigm according to Kuhn's definition, it does show how an individual's opinions and prejudices can affect how he or she internalizes scientific discourse. Vasconcelos was not the first person in Latin America to employ racialized paradigms, nor would he be the last.

<sup>29</sup> The supposition that changes to the body would lead to more eugenic progeny proved key to many of the post-revolutionary state's education and hygiene endeavors—both of which began under the auspices of Vasconcelos.

<sup>30</sup> Juan E. De Castro views Vasconcelos's *mestizo* construction as an early articulation of post-racial identity (103).

<sup>31</sup> As Chapter 2 shows, many post-revolutionary thinkers combined Vasconcelos's redemptive treatment of *mestizaje* with the genetic framework of Lamarckian genetics.

<sup>32</sup> Fell views the play as a Nietzschean "modern tragedy" that is both theatrical and



philosophical (*Águila* 464-66).

<sup>33</sup> Alejandro Ortiz Bullé Goyri notes Vasconcelos's key role in utilizing the theatre to export nationalistic discourses to the post-revolutionary masses (75-78). That the theatre would eventually make a turn towards more explicitly *indigenista* discourses—which Vasconcelos opposed—does not undermine his role in mining its educatory potential. Furthermore, *Prometeo vencedor* becomes an example of the type of theatre that Vasconcelos aimed to use to inculcate *mexicanidad* in his audience. It is not *indigenista*, but it calls for racial hybridity.

<sup>34</sup> Certainly, the demystification of the human predates posthuman theory as it is rooted in the discoveries of Charles Darwin.

<sup>35</sup> We should note that Satanás expresses regret for having destroyed Jesus (35-37), whose message greatly touched him. Indeed, Christ is the only godly figure who does not receive harsh criticism.

<sup>36</sup> Satanás's harsh treatment of Jehová may foreshadow Vasconcelos's later anti-Semitism. See Héctor Orestes Águilar (154-56).

<sup>37</sup> Vasconcelos is not alone in imagining a world that both opposes external imperialism and creates its own internal colonies. I develop this notion further in Chapter 3 by using texts that much more explicitly engage a drive for internal empire that emerged by the end of the Revolution.

<sup>38</sup> Depending on his political inclinations of the day, Vasconcelos would either ignore the indigenous component of Mexican identity (*Breve historia*) or accentuate it (*Indología*). See Ilán Stavans (4; 14); Marilyn Grace Miller (40-44).

<sup>39</sup> Miller argues that Vasconcelos viewed *mestizaje* as a “coalescence still to be realized” (29), a fact that very obviously ties him to the Latin American philosopher in *Prometeo vencedor*

who will take one thousand years to finish his work.

<sup>40</sup> Jaén asserts that Vasconcelos believed that the physical aspect of racial blending will catalyze an even greater spiritual awakening (xviii; xxv).

<sup>41</sup> Considering the oppression that both blacks and Amerindians have faced in Latin America, Walter Mignolo suggests that *mestizaje*, particularly in the form of *indigenismo*, became a tool of internal imperialism throughout Latin America (95-128).

<sup>42</sup> Vasconcelos was not always a devout Catholic, and he only returned to the faith later in life after speaking with Jesuit intellectuals. See Jaén (xxiv).

<sup>43</sup> Vasconcelos lists “la pobreza, la educación defectuosa, la escasez de tipos bellos, la miseria que vuelve a la gente fea” as the major causes of Mexican ugliness. Significantly, as I mention in the introduction, Mexican intellectuals of the day had identified these conditions as some of the performative features of indigenous culture.

<sup>44</sup> Miller affirms Sánchez Prado’s reading of the inclusive nature of Vasconcelian *mestizaje* when she states, “Against the backdrop of the ideology of white supremacy and superiority in Europe and the United States, Vasconcelos’ comments were radical and innovative, despite the obvious privileging of Western culture and the implicit deprecation of indigenous and black factors which would be ‘improved’ and ‘instructed’ by admixture with whites” (34-35).

<sup>45</sup> Vasconcelos saw indigenous cultures and Anglo-Saxon imperialism as serious threats to both Mexico and Latin America. For a brief discussion on how he opposed Iberoamerica to the Anglo-Saxon world, see Mónica E. Scarano (143-46).

<sup>46</sup> Despite Vasconcelos’s own racist pretensions, José-Antonio Orosco argues that the thinker directly contested unapologetically racist thinkers like Madison Grant of the United

States (4-7).

<sup>47</sup> The Anglo-Saxon women's opposition to Saturnino's designs may be a literary echo of Vasconcelos's own childhood, where, because he attended school in Eagle Pass, Texas, he found himself constantly facing anti-Mexican racism. This early experience led him to distrust the US in its dealings with his own country. See Alonso (463-65). Gabriella De Beers, however, notes a strange confluence of "anti-Yankee sentiments and a calm appraisal of the relationship between that country and Mexico" (274).

<sup>48</sup> Jaén distinguishes between Christianity—which Vasconcelos favored—and Catholicism, which he frequently criticized—at least in his early years. For Jaén, Christianity represented charity and love, ideals for which the thinker imperfectly strove (xxiv). However, the Mexican philosopher was also "virulently anti-Protestant" (Miller 31), so his Christian ideal ultimately reflected a deinstitutionalized Catholicism.

<sup>49</sup> Scientific knowledge and development are key to the creation and use of technology, a phenomenon that consists of tools that human beings create to facilitate the projects of their daily lives. One especially interesting component of technology is that it "interfaces" with and amends the nature of its human inventors as they develop their habits around these new tools (Hayles, *Posthuman* 33-34).

<sup>50</sup> In his *Republic*, Plato argues against democracy and in favor of an elitist, educated leader who knows the needs of the people better than they themselves (218-19). Saturnino is an excellent example of such a figure.

<sup>51</sup> Certainly, Vasconcelos would not have been aware of the term cyborg given that it would not be coined for another half century, but his juxtaposition of the human body is still telling as we consider his anti-imperialist exaltation of *mestizaje*.

## Chapter 2

### Emilio Fernández and the Race for Mexico's Body:

#### Immunization and Lamarckian Genetics

An iconic scene from Emilio “El Indio” Fernández’s *Río Escondido* (1947) occurs as the young, idealistic Rosaura Salazar (María Félix) steps off a train that has brought her from Mexico City to northern Chihuahua. The cameraman, Gabriel Figueroa, captures her lone figure in a low-angle, deep focus shot that frames her between a cactus and large, ominous clouds. She then plunges forward on her journey to Río Escondido, where, as a *maestra rural*, she will challenge institutional *caciquismo* by inculcating modern discourses, such as the desirability of medical immunizations, in her (indigenous) students. The film is an iconic example of the era’s nationalistic cinema that aesthetically differentiated itself from Hollywood through filmic techniques—particularly low-angle shots, curvilinear perspective, big skies, and oblique perspective—that posited the national landscape as a protagonist (Ramírez Berg, “Figueroa’s Skies” 28-30; Ramírez-Berg, “Cinematic Invention” 15-17; Lieberman and Hegarty 35-48; Villarreal Beltrán 4).<sup>1</sup> The movie also exemplifies why so many critics have identified Fernández and Figueroa as the heirs to the tradition of the muralists (Lieberman and Hegarty 33; Mraz 107-08, 110; Peña Rodríguez and Castellanos Cerda).<sup>2</sup> The director’s own statement, “sólo existe un México: El que yo inventé” (qtd. in Taibo 51), suggests that he consciously aimed to create an Andersonian “imagined community” that, given his emphasis on *indigenismo* and modernity, would accept the values of official *mestizaje* (6).<sup>3</sup> This chapter adds to the scholarship on “El Indio’s” work by arguing that the director centers social progress on the national body;<sup>4</sup> indeed, his protagonists initiate indigenous and female Mexicans into the modernity-driven, post-

revolutionary state by fusing their bodies with modern medicine, thus transforming them into *mestizos* through technological and cultural hybridity.

Because Fernández received moneys from the government—particularly the SEP—most scholars have viewed him as complicit with post-revolutionary doctrines (Mraz 107-08; Mora 78; Segre 87-94; Acevedo-Muñoz 24-25; Rangel 63). Dolores Tierney critiques this view when she says that the “myth that Fernández and Golden Age cinema unproblematically represented national self-image has passed into Mexican film lore and become institutionalized. Hence the majority of readings of this period in Mexican cinema elide what can be seen as obvious contradictions of Fernández’s films and Mexican post-Revolutionary society” (*Emilio Fernández* 2-3). Her focus does not preclude *mexicanidad* from the director’s *oeuvre*—indeed, all of her chapters engage the concept at some level—but it opens a space for nuanced readings that more adequately gauge how his work interfaced with the ideologies of the various presidencies that coincided with his career. “El Indio” was a remarkable Mexican director and *letrado* who, while certainly willing to accept government moneys, had strong personal and political convictions that informed his work. By separating “El Indio” from the role of mouthpiece for the government, my study detects common discourses of *mexicanidad* in films ranging from *María Candelaria* (1943)<sup>5</sup> and *Río Escondido*—despite the fact that the official version of national identity changed drastically in these years (Doremus 376; 396)—to US productions like *The Torch* (1950) that he filmed without financial aid from the Mexican government.<sup>6</sup>

Both of the case studies in this chapter center on the ability of medicine to “modernize” primitive (generally indigenous and/or female) bodies.<sup>7</sup> Following the Revolution, government leaders viewed health and hygiene as key components to modernity and economic development (Kapelusz-Poppi, “Rural Health” 261-67). This was in large part because post-revolutionary

eugenicists ascribed to Lamarckian paradigms, which held that physical improvements to the body would alter people's genotype, thus making them into more desirable individuals and progenitors. According to Nancy Leys Stepan, the acceptance of Lamarckism in Latin America—whose mixed-race identity marked it as dysgenic in European circles—reflected a cultural context that needed a means for nonwhite populations to overcome their perceived backwardness by improving their bodies. Within Mexico, Lamarckism extended beyond the Secretaría de Salubridad Pública to many other segments of government, including the SEP (Lewis 179). Just as medicine would hybridize the body with technology, education would create culturally hybrid indigenous subjects who would gain a fluency in European language and cultural forms. Thus the cultural missions, which consisted of rural education and hygiene (Mijangos 51-52), were eugenic projects that, according to Lamarckian paradigms, would convert Amerindians into not only cultural, but also biological *mestizos* (Antebi 167). As SEP-funded productions, “El Indio’s” films played a central role in this eugenic project because they strove to catalyze a similar modernizing process in their viewers.

The director's medical discourses—with the notable exception of *The Torch*—represent SEP-funded treatises on what Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba calls the post-revolutionary government's modernity-crazed “dictadura sanitaria” (“Dictadura” 119).<sup>8</sup> Through his “celluloid school” the director strove to modernize his viewers by fomenting sympathy for the cultural missions' twin projects of medicine and education (Tuñón, “Celuloide” 454, 466-68). In his *indigenista* films,<sup>9</sup> access to adequate healthcare converts indigenous bodies into technologically hybrid, cyborg entities that trouble the reigning body politics.<sup>10</sup> The destabilization of outdated structures of power—like *caciquismo* and indigenous serfdom—allows Amerindians to claim *mestizo* privileges if they modernize their bodies through medicine and education and abandon

their “backwards” heritage (Nahmad Rodríguez 113-14). In *The Torch*, “El Indio’s” English language remake of his masterpiece *Enamorada* (1946), a *zapatista* general and an American doctor fail to contain an influenza outbreak. The tragic deaths in this film challenge the simplistic notion that access to medicine automatically equals adequate healthcare and modernity. Here Fernández suggests that the country must follow its own path toward the future. Within these films’ Lamarckian paradigms, people who receive medical treatment from foreigners may become genetically foreign, rather than Mexican. Thus national (*mestizo*) doctors initiate—and interpellate—threatening bodies into their “proper” place in the patriarchal order of official *mestizaje*. Beyond immunizing people against harmful disease, they redeem them from their own “unacceptable” racial and gender performativities.

The intersection of medical discourse and rigid, racialized structures of power suggests an Agambian element to post-revolutionary biopolitics. Giorgio Agamben asserts that society divides human life into two groups: *bios*, those individuals that lead full, human lives, and *zoê*, those subjects who are somehow less than human (*Homo Sacer* 9-14). When “states of exception” arise, those in power can signal the *zoê* as *Homo Sacer*, or beings who “can be killed but not sacrificed” due to their subhuman status (*Homo Sacer* 12). Within post-revolutionary Mexico, the state ascribed *bios* to *mestizo* subjects while it signaled “primitive” indigenous societies as “bare” *zoê*. However, while Agamben views the distinction between *zoê* and *bios* as exceptionally rigid, it was quite fluid in post-revolutionary Mexico, where Amerindians could achieve *bios* if they followed official policies and adopted *mestizo* identity. The fact that official discourses allowed for and encouraged this upward mobility suggests that Agamben’s paradigm is insufficient to explaining the racialized biopolitics of the post-revolutionary state.

Roberto Esposito, another Italian biopolitical theorist, can shed some light where

Agamben does not. Building on the thought of Donna Haraway, who asserts that “the immune system is a plan for meaningful action to construct and maintain the boundaries for what may count as self and other in the crucial realms of the normal and the pathological” (204), he asserts an “immunization paradigm” that resonates both within biopolitical and posthuman thought (*Bíos* 45-77; Campbell vii-xlii). Instead of dividing humanity into *bios* and *zoê*, Esposito sees constant tension between the individual (*immunitas*) and the community (*communitas*), two selves, as it were, whose existence “is inscribed reciprocally in the logic of the other” (Campbell ix). Within Esposito’s view, the community—which paradoxically includes the individuals who compose it—represents threats against which individuals must immunize themselves. This theory translates strikingly well into the Mexican context, where the medic José Manuel Puig Casauranc wrote that hygiene projects aimed to “defender a maestros y alumnos de los peligros de la vida en comunidad” (qtd. in Urías Horcasitas 61-62; Puig Casaruanc 160-67). The doctor’s words lend credence to Esposito’s biopolitical theories, at least within the Mexican context, where immunological discourses were conflated with Lamarckian paradigms that aimed to reimage the national body.

Because Fernández produced his films within this biopolitical framework, his work can help us test to what extent the immunization paradigm explains mid-century Mexico. Rather than view his work in a rigid framework along the lines of Esposito, it is more useful to synthesize Esposito’s thought with that of Agamben. “El Indio’s” representations reflect a historical moment in which the state aspired to achieve *mestizo* modernity by immunizing itself from the performatively “bare lives” of Amerindians and sexualized women, particularly prostitutes (Abel 7-17; Agostini 463-68; Aréchiga Córdoba, “Dictadura” 129-41; Bliss “Health” 198-205; Bliss, “Health” 205-14; “Science” 5-40; Smith 39-46).<sup>11</sup> Given that disease was especially common in



rural, indigenous areas and in urban brothels, it is not surprising that the state began equating bad health with “immorality” (Aréchiga Córdoba, “Dictadura” 119; Bliss, “Health” 205-14; “Science” 5-40; Smith 39-46), which in turn obligated it to educate the children of such people (Schell 559-60).<sup>12</sup> According to the official discourse, Esposito’s dangerous community stems from indigenous and feminine *zoê* that performatively exists outside of official *mestizaje*.

As the state equated health with character, it also laid the foundation by which “bare lives” could be redeemed through repentant hybridization. It is perhaps for this very reason that “El Indio” juxtaposes medicine’s redemptive properties with Catholic imageries. This discursive strategy is especially interesting because, according to Benjamin T. Smith, “from the 1920s onwards, teachers, doctors and regional politicians linked the offer of hypodermics, hygiene and hospitals to anticlericalism” (41). In a sense, Smith points out that one performative failure that the state wished to eradicate from the (indigenous) masses was its excessive piety. Yet Fernández tapped into this very religiosity to buoy official discourses;<sup>13</sup> this fact is especially strange as we consider Joanne Hershfield’s assertion that the director harbored anticlerical feelings (*Mexican Cinema* 70-71). “El Indio’s” most positive representations of Catholic faith are the folkloric, sincere practices of the nation’s indigenous. But he also extends a privileged position to men of the cloth as it is through the conflation of God with the state that his films receive their moral compass. Regardless of the director’s personal feelings toward the Church, he ascribes it a key immunological role—both medical and societal—within mid-century Mexico.

While each film of this study views the clergy in a different light, the overriding narrative of the Church in Fernández’s oeuvre is its ability to intervene and temper the performative excesses—racial, gender, or socioeconomic—of Mexican subjects. The Church effectively immunizes the individuals of the community against themselves as it shows them their “proper”

place in society. This ideological function underscores a key tenet of Catholic and other Christian belief systems that hold that people undergo deep metaphysical changes as they repent, which in turn alludes to the very physical change to their genes that will occur within Lamarckian thought. We see hints of this in *María Candelaria* and *Río Escondido*, where the female protagonists represent “goodness, purity, and sacrifice” (Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema* 70), all of which equate them with the Virgin. In *Enamorada/The Torch*, the village priest plays a key role in fomenting social cohesion. In both cases, Church imagery sits alongside hybridizing discourses that unite the opposing factions of post-revolutionary society by fusing them together and obscuring distinctions between self and Other.

In order to explain how immunization deconstructs notions of the self, let us turn to the medical context, where it is useful to view both vaccinations and antibiotics as prosthetic implants that produce key slippages between self and Other inside of the body (Zylinska 216). As Esposito argues, implanted organs merit a different “ontological status than the one classically conceived for subjectivity: something that is both less than a human subject—because it has not life—and more, because when it replaces a diseased organ it allows the human subject to continue living” (*Immunitas* 149). Although Esposito refers specifically to organ transplants, his arguments also apply to medications like vaccinations and antibiotics. Significantly, all of these aforementioned immunized, hybrid bodies represent cyborg identities whose life depends on a symbiotic relationship with foreign bodies (Gray *Cyborg Citizen* 2; Hogle 206). Writing from the US context, Chris Hables Gray has argued that, given the social pressures associated with modern medicine, vaccinations represent a form of coerced cyborgization (95-97). His claims take on even greater weight within a post-revolutionary Mexican context, where the state aimed to transform indigenous and female Mexicans into *mestizo* subjects through modernizing

markings of the body. When Fernández's characters undergo medical treatments, their fusion with technology converts them into technologically hybrid, *mestizo* subjects. This fact later blurs the structural divisions of power that exclude them from privilege and ensures that these newly minted *mestizos*' children will automatically inherit their parents' physical "improvements."

This suggests that official hygiene campaigns served the dual purpose of initiating Mexican bodies into the *mestizo* state, and in immunizing individuals against the pitfalls of their pre-*mestizo* (and hence pre-modern) communities. Gretchen Kristine Pierce notes marginalizing discourses against both Amerindians and women when she observes, "experts believed that alcohol abuse would make the drinker more susceptible to tuberculosis and mental and venereal diseases, afflictions which could be spread to spouses and children" (13). Here the state conflated two apparently separate problems—sexually transmitted diseases and alcoholism—to the point that it was difficult to distinguish supposedly race-based threats from gender-based ones. The one common thread was that Mexico would overcome through medicine and modernity. Ultimately, the state manipulated discourses of race, gender, and sexuality to posit *mestizaje*'s moral superiority as it upheld traditional (patriarchal) values. Although the state had laudable intentions to better the lives of its people, particularly those living in rural communities (Aguilar Rodríguez "Cooking"; Lewis "Education"), it aimed to do so by further subordinating marginalized subjects to a top-down articulation of national character. Clearly, the end goal of the state was to allow—or even coerce—marginalized subjects to abandon their *zoê* in order to achieve *bios* status.

### **Cyborg Virgins: Redeeming Mexico through Traditional Modernity**

Fernández most emphatically represents this goal of instilling *bios* in the *zoê* through his

female protagonists María Candelaria and Rosaura, who, beyond their technologically hybrid status, also invoke the Virgin of Guadalupe. Although María Félix and Dolores del Río align their respective characters with both cyborg and Catholic discourses, each actress articulates very different forms and means of national redemption.<sup>14</sup> As we have already seen, Rosaura ushers a new era of modernity into the remote village of Río Escondido by immunizing its rural population both through medicine and education. Given her strong ties to the post-revolutionary state, Rosaura is a full-fledged member of *mestizo* society. María Candelaria, however, has no direct ties to the government, so her redemptive qualities are more mythic. The film codes her as Amerindian because she was born to an indigenous prostitute in the village of Xochimilco; however, because Dolores del Río was fair-skinned, her character's articulation of indigeneity is highly problematic.<sup>15</sup> According to Tierney, it is precisely the *criolla* actress's representation of indigeneity that whitens her character, thus distinguishing her from the movie's other Amerindians. Far from exalting indigenous subjects, the film celebrates "modern" Amerindians whose spiritual and phenotypic whiteness aligns them with *mestizo* values (*Emilio Fernández* 90-95). It is in part due to this "Indian princess's" fair skin that both the film and an unnamed painter signal her body as a symbol of (implicit) hybridity and national potential. Beyond their emulations of the Virgin, both female protagonists have medically enhanced bodies; María Candelaria receives antibiotics while Rosaura is vaccinated for smallpox before the film begins. Their ties to technology and the sacred codes both as cyborg Virgins, the perfect construction for a country that aimed to achieve modernity through technological advances and traditional morality.

It is necessary to provide brief summaries of the films in question in order to track the development and representations of the cyborg Virgin(s). In *Río Escondido*, the Mexican

president personally designates Rosaura as a *maestra rural*. He is only filmed from behind, and his voice equates him with God. We never see his “holy” face, yet he presides over the nation’s “benevolent” projects of indigenous incorporation. Rosaura goes to the town, where she stands up to *caciquismo* and immunizes the indigenous peasants from their pre-revolutionary performative failures, thus initiating them into modern society. She does this first through modern medicine when she helps Felipe, a rural doctor, administer immunizations to combat a smallpox outbreak, and later by teaching official doctrines that oppose *caciquismo* and promote capitalist expansion and mixed-race identity. Because she undermines his power, the local *cacique*, don Regino, attacks her in her home. She kills him, but later dies of a resulting heart attack.

The inhabitants of María Candelaria’s village despise her because her mother was a prostitute. They refuse to allow her to sell flowers within the city limits, which makes it difficult for her to pay off a debt that she owes the *cacique*, don Damián. She and her fiancé, Lorenzo Rafael (Pedro Armendáriz) go to a nearby town where a *criollo* painter—who emulates Diego Rivera (Tuñón “Femininity” 91)—sees her and wishes to paint her, but she refuses. Later, she gets malaria from a mosquito bite and requires a quinine that don Damián refuses to sell. Lorenzo Rafael breaks in to the *cacique*’s store by night and steals the medicine and a wedding dress. He saves his fiancée but is sent to jail. María Candelaria agrees to pose for the painter if he will post bail; however, after finishing her face he asks her to undress. She refuses, and the painter finishes his painting using another model’s body. The village’s indigenous inhabitants see the incriminating painting and stone María Candelaria to death.

Both Rosaura and María Candelaria provide a type of secular salvatory potential for their countrywomen and men that paradoxically draws strength from both traditional notions of

performativity and the hybrid body's resistance to outdated body politics. Thus the cyborg Virgin figure deconstructs the classic binary of the deified femininity of ecofeminism and an ambiguous cyborg that resists interpellations of the body that Haraway posits at the end of her "Cyborg Manifesto" (181). Nina Lykke views cyborgs and goddesses as protagonists of "the artefactual" and "the natural" respectively, suggesting that they represent two parallel wings of feminist thought that engage technology on the one hand and a return to nature on the other (75). Due to their monstrosity, both can potentially undermine patriarchal tendencies; indeed, despite discursive strategies that have historically separated them, "both the cyborg and goddess metaphors recast the non-human other in the role of subject, actor and agent in her/his own right" (82). Fernández's cyborg Virgins are excellent examples of marginalized subjects who become key agents of the state as they achieve *bios* through their "properly" (read: traditionally) gendered cyborg identities.

As "El Indio" films secular, cyborg Virgins, he further extends a discourse of hybridity already inherent to Guadalupan imageries and articulates a figure who will resonate differently for *mestizos*, *criollos*, and Amerindians. Although Lykke probably did not have Golden Age Mexican cinema in mind when she asked that we "explore the potentials of cybergoddesses" (85), Fernández's films provide fertile ground from which to gauge her ideas. As a construct of the *mestizo* state, the cyborg Virgin's liberatory potential is necessarily limited to assigning racial and gender Others their proper roles within the paradigm of official *mestizaje*. However, the mere decision of employing Guadalupan discourses in any way, according to Elena Feder, "challeng[es] the dominant versions of national identity with an Indian-inflected, unsurmountably dual, vision of *mestizaje*" (231). This is, of course, because so many critics and historians have noted the Virgin of Guadalupe's striking similarities to Aztec goddesses like

Tonantzin and even Mayáhuel (Oleszkiewicz 241-43, 246; Feder 244-46), which largely explains why this figure embodies Mexican Catholicism more than even Christ (Feder 241-42). The multiple significations of the image emphasize the Virgin of Guadalupe's own hybrid etymology, thus drawing attention to one of the greatest difficulties inherent to *mestizaje*: that of validating both European and indigenous heritage. Imperializing forces have long tried to subjugate the Virgin of Guadalupe's hybrid image to Eurocentric patriarchy; as indigenous deities were syncretically tied to Catholic saints, they necessarily subordinated their will to that of Christ and the Church. Of course, the Virgin of Guadalupe also bore a message of inclusion since it was her appearance to Juan Diego that asserted a special place for Amerindians within the Catholic Church and even the Spanish Empire. Thus the figure cuts both ways; she is a European appropriation of indigeneity, but for this very reason, she also reminds *mestizos* and *criollos* to include Amerindians in the nation.

As Mexico has reimagined itself over the years—during the colonial, the republican, and post-revolutionary periods—it has constantly returned to this goddess/saint. Her paradoxical knack for including everyone yet coercing them to conform to the reigning racial and patriarchal ideologies makes her an excellent figure for nation-building (Noble 82; Feder 242-44). “El Indio” exploits this potential with his own modern, cyborg Virgins to construct (and question) an autochthonous national identity. Mirroring Mexican Catholicism's ultimate subjugation of the Virgin of Guadalupe/Tonantzin into patriarchal religious structures, the post-revolutionary *letrado* ties technologically hybrid female bodies to the modernity-driven, patriarchal discourse of official *mestizaje*. Fernández certainly was not privy to cyborg or ecocritical debates as he filmed in the 1940s, yet his work sheds light on the extent to which those in power can invoke cyborg, feminine deities to proclaim liberation even as they perpetuate their own hegemony.

Rosaura and María Candelaria bear the inclusive token of modernity to the masses, but the Amerindians cannot partake of said modernity without first accepting the national narratives of their imperialists. What is more, because the cyborg Virgins' worth comes from upholding traditional notions of sexuality, the articulation of their bodies problematizes tendencies toward both the sacred and the cyborg in ways that stretch current understandings of both posthumanism and ecocriticism.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps one of the most interesting things that we can take from these performances of technologically hybrid—yet traditionally “chaste” and “pure”—women is the constructed nature of even the most “liberatory” of discourses. Both seem like perfect mid-century articulations of what Jerry Hoeg calls “cybermestizas,” an inclusive category “in which both performativity and material body are in constant flux, and therefore immune to rigid categorization” (99). Yet they remain susceptible to rigid interpellations of the body that require both to “remain [ . . . ] virgin[s] for the benefit of the nation” (Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema* 70). Fernández's cyborg Virgins clearly represent nationalistic liberation despite conforming to racial and gender norms. What is more, their bodies—as well as those of the indigenous peasants of their towns—most certainly are, “in constant,” but not infinite, “flux.” Rosaura succeeds in tapping the redemptive potential of these shifting notions of performativity by encouraging the indigenous population of Río Escondido to assimilate to the dominant class. María Candelaria, however, is never able to inspire the Amerindians of her town to adopt a more modern worldview. This remarkable distinction between the characters is not only a determining factor regarding the success of each; it is key to understanding the resistant role that “El Indio” imagines for his cyborg Virgins in general.

In part because the post-revolutionary state continued to struggle against local strongmen



across the country well into the mid-century, both films show *mestizo caciques* who oppress the indigenous peasants of their respective towns. These strongmen represent a distinct articulation of racial hybridity from that of official *mestizaje*. Rather than incorporate indigenous Mexicans into the body politic, these *caciques* perpetuate racial differences that have historically exalted *mestizo* and *criollo* subjects while relegating Amerindians to serfdom and peasantry (Quijano 535-36). Don Regino owns all of the property in Río Escondido, so the peasants cannot evade him even in their (his) homes. He also controls the town's two wells, and he warns the inhabitants that he will execute anyone who attempts to "steal" water from the one he has designated for himself. Similar to don Regino, don Damián controls Xochimilco's flow of money. He owns the only store, is the lone creditor, and most employment goes through him. Thus the village's inhabitants earn the money necessary to buy needed goods and to pay off debts by working for or through the strongman.

Both *caciques* benefit from a biopolitics that places them in a position of privilege along both racial and gender lines, so they jealously strive to maintain the status quo. This is especially the case with regards to how they handle the presence of their respective cyborg Virgins and state attempts to carry out immunization. Because medicated bodies—both indigenous and *mestizo*, male and female—necessarily alter the reigning body politics, the strongmen's ability to maintain power depends on their blocking the democratizing effect of modern medicine on the masses. Don Regino cannot curb an immunization effort after a smallpox outbreak in his town, nor can he silence the redemptive discourses that Rosaura disseminates in the classroom. For his part, however, don Damián successfully blocks the Amerindians of Xochimilco from gaining access to medicine that would alter the biopolitical landscape. What is more, he also contains María Candelaria's salvatory potential when he has the rest of the town's indigenous population

stone her to death.

The cyborg Virgin's failure to inspire change in the people of Xochimilco is especially surprising when we consider "El Indio's" obsession with producing a redemptive, educational cinema (Tuñón, "Celuloide" 441-45). However, María Candelaria's failures occur in large part because the film is set in a pre-revolutionary time where government officials carelessly enforce rural hygiene. Two doctors arrive with serums while don Damián yells at his indigenous laborers with the force and authority of a slave-driver. After witnessing the *cacique's* abuse of the indigenous people of his town, the doctors give him jars of medicine with instructions to medicate the Amerindians if they contract malaria. Hershfield argues that "Don Damián articulates the state's paternalistic attitude toward the Indians" when he tells the doctors that he forces them to take their medicine in front of him to ensure that they do not waste it (*Mexican Cinema* 55). However, the fact that we never see the *cacique* administer the quinine suggests that he aims to keep the medicine—and its accompanying privilege—away from the inhabitants of Xochimilco. Figueroa masterfully captures the division of bodies as the strongman places the jars in his store; the *mestizo* and the pills sit on one side of the counter, while the indigenous bodies remain segregated on the other. In an act that disregards the orders of the state, he sells them at an exorbitant price, thus tying access to adequate healthcare to racial identity. The government doctors—who ostensibly favor the incorporation of indigenous peoples—appear to respect don Damián's racial privilege when they choose not to follow up on his efforts to medicate the town. The *cacique's* action results in only one person, María Candelaria, ever using the serum, but even that happens against his will.

The film demonstrates María Candelaria's servile relationship to the *cacique* through her debt of 9.5 Mexican pesos, which constricts her agency in very real ways. She is unable to marry

Lorenzo Rafael because they cannot afford a wedding dress or ceremony. Beyond economically oppressing María Candelaria, Xochimilco's strongman frequently expresses an erotic desire for her. Yet María Candelaria upholds traditional female sexual norms and rebuffs the *cacique's* advances, thus maintaining both her virginity and purity. Don Damián's desire for María Candelaria highlights the emphasis on her body. Throughout the film she is described as "beautiful" according to European aesthetics that favor fair features over the indigenous. It is for this reason that the painter signals her very body as a message of hope that other Indians must see and emulate. This produces an especially potent irony; the indigenous inhabitants of Xochimilco despise María Candelaria for the original sin of her mother's prostitution. Yet her possible ties to *mestizaje*—manifested in her phenotypic whiteness—probably come from her mother's promiscuity with a fair-skinned father.<sup>17</sup> In the context of Fernández's *indigenismo*, María Candelaria becomes a perfect example of Mexicanness as she, similar to the Virgin, resists simple racial classifications and in which she paradoxically represents every race and none at all.

Her ties to technology and hybridity result from a raft ride she takes with Lorenzo Rafael. Figueroa's overhead shot of the actress invokes the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as it captures her surrounded by lilies. While in this saintly position, she melodramatically swats a mosquito that has bitten her. This scene fits into the paradigm of educational film that Fernández constantly produced; by showing his protagonist contract malaria from a mosquito bite, he implores his audience to take care in swampy areas. However, any practical lessons we can extract from this scene take a back seat to mythic discourses that juxtapose her saintliness with an infection that will ultimately lead to her medication and technological hybridity. When Lorenzo Rafael attempts to buy quinine at the *cacique's* store, don Damián points a rifle at him from the merchant side and orders him to leave. The image that Figueroa captures here

performatively demonstrates don Damián's monopoly over the town's medication, which in turn affirms the *cacique*'s defense of racial structures of power within Xochimilco. There is also a personal element to don Damián's behavior; María Candelaria has spurned him for Lorenzo Rafael. Since she has refused his advances, the *cacique* will exercise what he views as his right to deny her the life-saving medications she needs. After stealing the quinine Lorenzo Rafael arrives at María Candelaria's home; finding her unconscious, he decides to medicate her without her consent.

This scene underscores the fact that María Candelaria, like all of the indigenous characters in the films discussed in this chapter, cannot accept or reject medication and technological hybridity; instead, others impose it on them. Beyond bringing medicine, Lorenzo Rafael also seeks help from a *criollo* rural doctor who is almost certainly an agent of the state. Between the doctor's expertise and the quinine, María Candelaria recovers. This sequence underscores the fact that indigeneity, which according to Fernández entails an aversion to modern medicine, is still a vice against which the state must immunize its citizens in a top-down manner. This is not to say that state efforts to medicate ill indigenous bodies are necessarily immoral; indeed, María Candelaria would die without treatment. However, as the state reserves the right to technologically hybridize its Amerindian population, it also becomes a colonizing force that coerces indigenous actors into abandoning their cultural heritage. The threat that modernization—symbolized by medicine—represents leads the indigenous subjects of Fernández's films to frequently resist modern medication. But because they oppose progress and advancement, the director rarely permits their arguments to come across as intelligent.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps the most outspoken critic of modern, Western medicine in this film is the local *huesera*, who also tries to cure María Candelaria of malaria. She voices her displeasure upon seeing that Lorenzo

Rafael has invited a medical doctor, telling him to choose between the doctor and herself. While the aforementioned scene shows indigenous distrust of medics and modern medicine, the *huesera*'s juxtaposition with the cool-headed *criollo* doctor leads the audience to side with the doctor and not the *huesera*. By this means, "El Indio" exalts the scientifically sound opinions of the practitioners of modern medicine that he believes will ultimately immunize the population against a tradition of *hueseras*, thus paving the way for the modernization of the nation.

After the doctor and Lorenzo Rafael medicate María Candelaria, she becomes a cyborg subject whose modernized body has been incorporated culturally and genetically into the *mestizo* mainstream. Immunized against her own pre-modern body, she now undermines power structures that aim to constrict her agency despite the fact that she at no point becomes an activist. María Candelaria shows her ability to resist don Damián shortly after healing. As she and Lorenzo Rafael prepare to marry, the *cacique* arrives with police and has Lorenzo Rafael arrested for theft. The cyborg Virgin fails to convince the local authorities to be lenient with her fiancé, but she later enlists the help of the priest and the painter. This leads Dolores Tierney to argue that "the film aligns María Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael with these 'good' and 'reasonable' white characters" while at the same time distancing her from "bad" indigenous characters (*Emilio* 90). Between her immunization and association with these characters, María Candelaria becomes more modern—and hence more *mestizo*—than even the mixed-race *cacique*, a fact that positions her as the blueprint for national progress and redemption. Unfortunately, however, this pre-revolutionary Mexico is not yet ready for a cyborg Virgin or for her representation of racial and technological hybridity.

Her relationship with the painter is especially interesting; as a *criollo* with European artistic tendencies, he embodies the cultural values that the SEP hoped to promulgate through art

and films like *María Candelaria*. The painter has long attempted to fuse indigenous culture with European art to initiate the native population in the wonders of Western culture, but he has never found an adequate subject to paint. Upon finding María Candelaria, he believes he has met an Indian princess who can inspire the masses toward *mestizaje* and modernity. His obsession with María Candelaria's body, which he wishes to paint nude, reminds us of her body's overall significance throughout the film. Despite the fact that Haraway's cyborg delegitimizes constructions of racial and gendered performativity, the redemptive nature of María Candelaria's cyborg Virgin body is firmly rooted in both technological hybridity and traditional gender norms. Interestingly, and perhaps paradoxically, she remains a discursively chaste cyborg Virgin precisely because of her refusal to associate with the high culture of European nude art.<sup>19</sup> This is one of the most interesting and paradoxical aspects of the film; on the one hand, Fernández's *indigenista* films aimed to incorporate the indigenous community into the *mestizo* state by instilling European cultural norms in the masses, yet here we see that María Candelaria would lose her redemptive value if she were to cede to Western culture. Regarding the painting, Laura Podalsky argues, "what had scandalized the villagers probably would not have the same effect on the spectator." This suggests that one key element to the film is that of re-instilling an indigenous innocence, and even spirituality,<sup>20</sup> in the audience. Because *mestizaje* is ultimately a process of hybridization, official discourses had to negotiate the fact that certain elements of indigenous identity would necessarily remain in Mexico forever, thus transforming white cultures as well. The painter may believe that he holds all of the keys to redeeming the indigenous masses, but it is his subject's ultimate refusal to fully assimilate to his European artistic and cultural tendencies that signals her as the ideal example of racial, technological, and cultural hybridity.

The focus on these hybridities comes through especially clearly as the painter

superimposes another model's body on María Candelaria's face, thus creating a type of Frankenstein's monster. Tierney argues that the fact that the artist must connect the body of another model to María Candelaria's head suggests that the Indian princess "has 'no body'" (94), particularly in a sexual sense. Because we never see it, Renae L. Mitchell observes that "the viewer is left to imagine what the portrait of a young woman of 'pure Mexican race' would look like." We can only know that such a painting depicts a hybrid body, and that the body of a cyborg Virgin such as María Candelaria only becomes sexed when fused with that of another woman with "lower" values. The hybrid fusion of two female bodies becomes a way to explore the Virgin's forbidden sexuality without defiling her innocence. Of course, this hybrid art results in an incriminating painting that testifies against María Candelaria's chastity and ultimately leads to her martyrdom. The protagonist's death underscores the irony of Fernández's *indigenista* film; while "El Indio" argues for the incorporation of Mexico's indigenous peoples, the state must meticulously oversee such efforts. Left to their own devices, the Amerindians of *María Candelaria* are petty, violent, and woefully unaware of their own best interests (Noble 88-91). If the painter is correct in his appraisal of the redemptive value of María Candelaria's body, then the people of Xochimilco ultimately reject and kill their own secular savior. The film ends as Lorenzo Rafael rows his fiancée's dead body—decorated like the Virgin of Guadalupe—away from Xochimilco on a raft. The tragedy extends far beyond the protagonist's death; by killing the person who could have shown them how to enter into a modern world, María Candelaria's murderers have condemned themselves to generations of second-class citizenship.

The tragic ending signals the extraordinary scope of the post-revolutionary state's mission; rather than content itself with turning a few "exemplary" indigenous subjects to technological hybridity and *mestizo* modernity, it must immunize each individual of the

indigenous community against its own perceived performative failures. This endeavor stretches Esposito's discourses of *immunitas* and *communitas* to their limits as the immunization of every member of the community (theoretically) produces a new, *bios* community. The state necessarily fails to discursively immunize all of the indigenous characters in *María Candelaria* in part because the film takes place prior to the Revolution. However, this does not necessarily mean that the film is "an isolationist fantasy rather than a parable on modernization" (Tierney 96). By positing *María Candelaria* as a technologically hybrid incarnation of the Virgin, Fernández suggests a nascent potential to redeem all of the nation's Amerindians. Indeed, his protagonist's death merely postpones the inevitable march toward national, *mestizo* modernity. Interestingly, he centers post-revolutionary indigenous redemption on another cyborg Virgin in *Río Escondido*. With the help of enlightened state actors and government officials, Rosaura Salazar succeeds where her predecessor could not. It is largely due to her work that official programs extend immunization—both through medicine and the school—to the indigenous peasants of Río Escondido, thus incorporating them into official, *mestizo* modernity.

Rosaura faces many of the same obstacles to modernization that Fernández identifies in the pre-revolutionary society of *María Candelaria*. Tierney offers an against-the-grain reading by asserting that the film indicts the Alemán administration's failures to combat continued "widespread poverty, illiteracy and disease" along with *caciquismo*, and systemic racism in rural communities three decades after the Revolution's end (*Emilio Fernández* 150).<sup>21</sup> While the academy recognizes Fernández's preference for Cárdenas over succeeding presidents (Tuñón, "Emilio Fernández" 183-84), Tierney's depiction of the film as critical of government policies contrasts with most scholarship, which follows the lead of Carl J. Mora, who refers to it as "an outstanding effort of official interest filmmaking" (78).<sup>22</sup> Whether or not it criticizes Alemán,<sup>23</sup>



the film certainly “glorifies state authority” (Fein 123), and deifies the presidency (Chávez, “Eagle” 121). Throughout the film “El Indio” celebrates the state actors—particularly rural doctors and teachers—who redeem the nation. The terrifying prospect of poorly equipped teachers and doctors entering hostile territory has its roots in reality (Kapelusz-Poppi, “Physician” 35-38). As Erica Segre notes, “El Inido” wanted to “pay homage to the martyrs of progress but also to vindicate the government subsidized *Misiones culturales* at a time when they were being denounced as outlets for inflammatory Communist propaganda” (93).<sup>24</sup> The triumphant view of the *maestra rural* challenges Alemán’s antagonism to the movement,<sup>25</sup> so, in the end, film is highly nationalistic even if it at times deviates from the ideologies of the current administration (García Riera, *Emilio* 108-21).<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, “El Indio” suggests that the government and its actors are the only entity capable of carrying out the idealistic goals of the Revolution, and if it is to continue modernizing as Alemán desires, it must not betray the values of the Revolution.

The film represents the power struggle between the nascent, post-revolutionary government and regional *caudillos* in a Manichean light. Although it is implied, we never see Rosaura’s cyborg Virgin body undergo medical immunization; however, at the beginning of the film she goes through the Palacio Nacional, where the murals of Diego Rivera and the images of past presidents (re)teach her of her national heritage.<sup>27 28</sup> This scene effectively immunizes Rosaura from the contaminating effects of the actress who plays her, an act that is especially necessary considering that María Félix claimed to have “corazón de hombre” (Félix 33; Pizarro 186). Rather than admitting a transgender identity, the actress is probably signaling her drive to inhabit spaces previously restricted to men—a fact that made her a highly polemical figure.<sup>29</sup> Susan Dever sees Fernández’s decision to cast María Félix in this role as especially useful

because it “underscore[s] the transformation of the independent woman to dutiful charge of the state” (60). As a redeemed individual herself, Rosaura is the perfect candidate for leading a cultural mission that will incorporate rural Amerindians through education. When Rosaura arrives in Río Escondido, she tells don Regino that the president has commissioned her to open a school. The *cacique* replies, “aquí no hay más presidentes que yo.”<sup>30</sup> This play on words—don Regino holds the title of *presidente municipal*—underscores the conflict between the center and the periphery.

At the same time, the film challenges a simple binary of center/periphery because the state clearly represents what it views as indigenous interests. Thus the film frames the power struggle between the central government and *caciquismo*—embodied by the struggle between the saintly Rosaura and barbarous don Regino—as in the best interest of the great majority of rural subjects. This becomes especially clear when this teacher finds a mother of three who is dying of smallpox. Rosaura takes the children out of the home, telling them that that they will get sick if they stay inside, and sends for the rural medic, Felipe. She adopts the children and helps the doctor attend to the dying woman. This scene signals Rosaura as both Virgin and mother, thus drawing an implicit parallel between herself and the nation’s most popular saint. In so doing, this scene imbues her with a secular moral authority that borders on the divine. Less obviously, it also identifies her as a cyborg. The fact that both she and Felipe can freely enter the infected home alludes to their past vaccinations. What is more, they show that their Mexico City-based cultural mission serves the best interest of rural Mexicans living at the mercy of brutish *caciques*.

For Fernández, both medics and teachers play significant immunological roles in post-revolutionary racial projects; the former modernize the primitive body through modern medicine while the latter purify the soul by instilling proper behavior and racial performativity.<sup>31</sup> “El

Indio” further exalts these state-appointed actors as he juxtaposes them with don Regino, who irrationally forbids the protagonists from burning the deceased woman’s home in an attempt to contain the smallpox epidemic. The *cacique*’s attitude exposes the biopolitics that give him his power and interpellate indigenous Mexicans into bare life. The value of Indian lives is so low for him that he refuses to take a common sense medical action and burn a small, virus-ridden adobe home. That don Regino’s actions go beyond mere indifference becomes even more obvious when he forbids any attempts to vaccinate the “*indiada*.” Clearly, he views the threat of an alliance between the state and the Amerindians—catalyzed and symbolized through medical immunization—as a greater threat than even smallpox. Only after taking ill does don Regino desist. He asks Felipe to cure him, and the doctor accepts on the condition that the *cacique* allow him to immunize the town’s population and open Rosaura’s school. Ironically, it is doubtful that Felipe truly heals don Regino; because smallpox is a virus, no cure exists beyond an individual’s immune system (Mayo Clinic “Definition”; “Treatments”). Thus any medical procedure that don Regino undergoes will not immunize him in any sense. His ultimate survival results from naturally beating the infection without the help of medical technology. The indigenous bodies that Felipe will soon vaccinate, then, can claim cultural, technological, and in a Lamarckian sense genetic *mestizaje* in a way that don Regino cannot.

As in *María Candelaria*, immunizations occur without indigenous approval. This fact underscores an elitist attitude that “portrayed Mexico’s indigenous peoples as pure and simple, like children who had to be led to [. . .] consciousness by the intellectual elite” (Hershfield “Screening the Nation” 268-69). Here, the state, like a parent, must lead its indigenous children toward hybridity and modernity, even if this goes against their collective will. The resulting lack of agency leads Tuñón to view Fernández’s indigenous characters as beings “without opinions of

their own, like a machine” (“Femininity” 86). While this machine metaphor is interesting, particularly in the present analysis, we should note that Fernández’s Amerindians frequently harbor opinions that run contrary to the values of official *mestizaje*. For example, when don Regino decrees their vaccinations, the peasants, understandably suspicious of the *cacique*’s motives, attempt to flee. His henchmen coerce the people to comply by lassoing, dragging, and even shooting them as they escape. Their actions reaffirm racial hierarchies even as Felipe attempts to undermine them. Don Regino’s lackeys can maim and kill indigenes with impunity because the reigning biopolitics in Río Escondido signals indigenous people as *Homo Sacer* subjects, thus placing them outside of the (local) law’s protection (Agamben, *Homo Sacer* 12-13). As such, Rosaura and Felipe cannot effectively intervene. The creation of indigenous cyborg bodies, however, cracks this old system and catalyzes a new body politics where technologically hybrid bodies represent the new *bios* of the institutionalized revolution.

Significantly, it is Rosaura, the cyborg Virgin, who finally finds a peaceful resolution to the roundup. She convinces the local priest to ring the church bell, and the violence abruptly ends as the peasants immediately congregate outside the church building. The juxtaposition of Rosaura with the Church underscores her Messianic nature as a cyborg, Virgin, and teacher and alludes to the redemptive nature—at least according to the official ideology—of the incipient medical project. Of course, this discursive incorporation of indigenous Mexicans into the *mestizo* state is hardly innocent; by hybridizing Amerindian bodies, the state attempts to immunize them against their native culture and performativity. As a result, this scene also represents an attempt to domesticize Mexico’s indigenous population through the symbol of the Church, a practice that dates back to the Conquest. Just as immunization occurs against the will of local *caciques*, it also frequently happens despite the misgivings of the very people that the state aims to uplift. In the

end, it represents a new form of cultural imperialism as the state forces Amerindians to assimilate to a new culture and economy.

Rosaura and Felipe begin the immunization process after they gather the peasants outside of the local church. Coupled with the education that the teacher and doctor bear, these vaccinations play a key immunological role in undermining performative indigenous “failures” that have kept the peasants on the periphery of a rapidly modernizing state. In a scene that draws to mind N. Katherine Hayles’s observation that “human beings are conceived, gestated, and born. [ . . . ] Machines are designed, manufactured, and assembled” (“Life Cycle” 322), the peasants line up and, one by one, receive their vaccinations with an impersonality and efficiency that reminds the viewer more of a Fordian assembly line than a medical procedure. This scene challenges Esposito’s notion of immunizing the individual against the community because the indigenous masses are never treated as anything other than a collective entity. Thus we should view this segment as the conversion of an entire previously *zoê* community into *bios*. After this dramatic scene, the Amerindians can no longer be killed with impunity. The new technologically hybrid masses can finally interface with the modern state, but they must do so through Rosaura, who intercedes between them and the government in a way that mirrors a Catholic saint’s intercession with God. Even after achieving technological hybridity, these indigenous actors remain children whom the state must nurture through its messianic actors, particularly medics and teachers.

Not all communities are immunized; there is no indication, for example, that Felipe medicates don Regino’s lackeys, and the scant filmic evidence suggests that these men do not receive medical care. This becomes especially clear as Brígido stays in don Regino’s room and watches from the window as Felipe and Rosaura immunize the masses. At one point, don Regino

orders his henchman to draw nearer to him; Brígido lifts a handkerchief to his mouth and nose and trembles as he inches toward his boss. The bandit's fear in this sequence suggests that we never see Brígido's vaccination because he never receives one. This is completely possible; Felipe's ultimatum is silent on the fate of don Regino's posse. It makes sense within the film's discursive framework that the *cacique's* henchmen would not deserve technological hybridity. The fact that neither the *criollo/mestizo* antagonists nor the indigenous population are technological hybrids upon the teacher's arrival signals a key, understudied discursive element of how *letrados* like Fernández understood official *mestizaje*. While Matthew J.K. Hill observes that the value of Fernández's Indians is their identity as "mestizos in embryo" (41), we should recognize that the same holds true for *criollos* and even *mestizos* who have not accepted the state's articulation of *mestizo* modernity. The racial value that the film tries to promote is not attached specifically to European blood ties, but to the fusion of all cultures and races to build an "authentically Mexican," future-oriented nation.

The need for *mestizos* to achieve technological hybridity comes out especially clearly through the previous *maestra rural*, Mercedes, who has never received a vaccination. This is especially significant because it seems unlikely that the 1940s Mexican state that obsessed with its hygiene program would have commissioned an unvaccinated *maestra rural* to a place like Río Escondido. This technological bareness signals her, similar to the rest of the characters, as a member of the *zoê* whom the state must redeem through Rosaura. Fernández amplifies the significance of immunization by showing how this former *maestra* has ceded to don Regino's *machismo*, thus allowing him to take her as a lover and convert the schoolhouse into a stable. Within the framework of the film, Mercedes's failure to uphold official teachings of race and gender disqualifies her from both cyborg and Virgin status. This in turn makes her incapable of

teaching the inhabitants of Río Escondido any alternatives to *caciquismo*. Whereas Rosaura is a cyborg Virgin, Mercedes represents an unvaccinated type of la Malinche,<sup>32</sup> thus creating an interesting character foil for Rosaura. Despite her failures to uphold official ideals of performativity, Mercedes is the only *mestizo/a* that we see vaccinated. This is because Mercedes ultimately is not an active oppressor. Due to her gender, she, like the local inhabitants of Río Escondido, is one of the victims of *caciquismo* that the state aims to liberate and redeem. The fact that Felipe and Rosaura withhold medical privileges from the male, *mestizo* ruffians does not preclude these figures from immunological discourses. Instead, it emphasizes that, while the state can immunize itself against indigenous and feminine tendencies through technological hybridity, it must cure *caciquismo* through forceful removal.

Rosaura, the Messianic cyborg Virgin and *maestra rural*, heads the two-pronged effort of immunizing the state from Amerindian culture and *cacique* corruption. After Felipe initiates the peasants into modern culture through technological hybridity, the children start attending school. If we wish to extend the religious metaphor further, immunization serves as a type of baptism in that it initiates indigenous characters—still babies in post-revolutionary ideologies—into secular, *mestizo* society, but they still have much to learn. Rosaura fomenters what Anderson terms as a nationalistic “communion” through education (6), which will require further knowledge and immunization. Before her first class, the camera rests on a poster of a drunken, passed-out Indian dressed in a *sarape*. The caption reads: “Esto ya se acabó. México en lucha por la grandeza económica.” Although the state has marked these Amerindians with modernity, it still must eradicate supposed performative failures like drunkenness through a robust education program if it wishes to further change their genotype. Thus Rosaura, in abolishing alcoholism, performs a medical act that, within Lamarckism, reprograms the genes at least as much as vaccines (Antebi

163-65). This fact suggests that Fernández viewed teachers as more central to the post-revolutionary *misiones culturales* than even medics.

The teacher's immunological role goes beyond ending indigenous jocularity and extends to opposing *caciquismo*. During her first lesson, she shows the children an image of the revered indigenous president, Benito Juárez, who served from 1858-1872, telling them that he is the proof that they can become "useful" members of society (García Benítez "Identidad"). Her focus on utilitarianism lays bare the modernity-driven discourses that run rampant throughout the film; upon overcoming their "Indianness,"<sup>33</sup> these children will become workers in the capitalistic *mestizo* state. Perhaps the most crucial lesson occurs when Rosaura divides the nation between "buenos mexicanos," all of whom are technological hybrids at this moment, and "malos mexicanos," such as the *cacique* don Regino. According to Liz Consuelo Rangel, "*Río Escondido* resalta la virtud de aquellos *buenos* mexicanos que siguen el ejemplo de la Revolución contra la de aquéllos que se resisten a compartir la riqueza con los indígenas y se aferran a aceptar los nuevos cambios que prometen el mejoramiento nacional" (64-65 emphasis in original). Only after trying to show the *malos mexicanos* the errors of their ways are the people justified in removing them by force. Clearly, within Rosaura's classroom, the ability to read and write serves as a vehicle that will help her indigenous pupils to learn, understand, and—more importantly—internalize official ideologies.

One of the most surprising aspects of the film is that don Regino fails to recognize that Rosaura represents the greatest threat to his power, and instead focuses on Felipe. In one instance, he chances upon the medic as he instructs many elderly women to boil water before drinking it. After telling them of the bacteria and amoebas that live in the water he says, "es preferible hervir el agua y acabar con ellos [the microbes] porque al contrario nos matan a



nosotros.”<sup>34</sup> Although at the surface Felipe’s words reflect “innocent” attempts to teach women how to avoid disease (López Pérez 259-61), he clearly equates don Regino with the microbes. As Felipe speaks, scientific rhetoric and paradigms become thinly veiled attacks on don Regino and any other “parasite” that would harm the Mexican nation and state. The *cacique* immediately takes Felipe away from the indigenous women and orders him to leave town. Given the recent shift in the structures of power, don Regino has to be clandestine as he banishes Felipe; the camera itself is excluded from their conversation. Because the state-run immunization effort has already challenged don Regino’s racial privilege, his decision to banish the doctor reflects not his power, but his impending impotence. Ironically, banishing Felipe while allowing Rosaura to continue to teach becomes the biggest miscalculation that the *cacique* makes during the entire movie. The cyborg Virgin continues to appear before her students even after the medic leaves, and her redemptive lessons inspire the indigenous masses to oppose systemic racism.

The strongman attempts to subdue the unruly *maestra rural* by offering her a luxurious home if she will accept him as her lover. Such a strategy has worked before with Mercedes; unfortunately for the *cacique*, Rosaura indignantly refuses the proposition. Along with denouncing the evils of *caciquismo*, the film also exalts the traditional qualities of motherhood and chastity that official ideologies continued to prescribe. Rosaura may not denaturalize the reigning discourses of appropriate gender performativity, but her cyborg acts are still redemptive within post-revolutionary paradigms. By eschewing the *cacique*’s advances, and the comfortable lifestyle that he offers, she opts for self-renunciation. Thus she, similar to the Virgin, remains a champion for the indigenous masses. Don Regino later tries to apologize by visiting Rosaura while she is teaching class, but she and her students shame him out of the building. This signals the first moment in which technologically hybrid, immunized Mexicans withhold privileges from

don Regino. Rosaura's action effectively erases the ruffian from the master narrative of *mexicanidad*, relegating his practice of exploiting Amerindians to the status of a failed "pre-revolutionary social structure" (Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema* 63). Despite a shared racial heritage with don Regino, Rosaura's camaraderie lies with her indigenous pupils, who, like her, are technological hybrids. This signals a change in the relationship between racialized bodies in the pueblo, where these cyborg bodies represent a eugenic, authentically Mexican, *mestizaje*.

Fernández shows this shift when the village well dries out and don Regino shoots Rosaura's adopted son as he tries to take water from the *cacique*'s personal well. Unlike the scene where his henchmen murder fleeing Amerindians without repercussions, the *cacique* now faces the united wrath of the entire town. Clearly, the medical and educational immunization has produced a new biopolitical makeup in the town. Rosaura holds a funeral—which Figueora masterfully films—with indigenous instruments meant to infuriate the *cacique*. Don Regino tries to rape Rosaura and shame her out of town, but she shoots him to death on the school grounds. Not only does Rosaura preserve her virginity, but she compounds her attacker's failures to sexually dominate her by using a pistol—a type of phallic device—to block him. This last affront to don Regino's *mestizo* male privilege is intimately tied to his loss of corporeal privilege following the democratizing effects of immunization through education and medicine. In killing her attacker, Rosaura also catalyzes the act that will immunize the village against *caciquismo*, the final impediment to indigenous redemption. Shortly after don Regino's death, the peasants swarm down upon the remaining ruffians and lynch them while a triumphant march plays in the background.

This revolt marks the first time that the masses have acted on their own. As the people of Río Escondido have overcome their own performative failures through immunization, they have

also learned how to act in accordance with the discourses of official *mestizaje*. By descending on the terrified bandits—who are also on school grounds—they complete the final immunizing act in the town. Afterwards, Río Escondido is a modern space where every body, regardless of phenotype, has assimilated to the national genotype of *mestizaje*. Immediately after this triumph, Rosaura suffers a heart attack and, after receiving a letter of gratitude from the president himself, she dies. Susan Dever reads Rosaura's death as a narrative necessity because strong-willed *maestras rurales* “were ultimately antithetical to the long-term goals of this [post-revolutionary] project; consequently their primary service to nation-building had to be carefully controlled” (59). Similar to Vasconcelos's Indian, Fernández's female rural teacher's greatest gift to Mexico is the sacrifice of her own life in order to give rise to a new *mestizo* nation. The last great immunization, then, is that of Rosaura herself; having laid the foundation for the redemption of the village, she has fulfilled her role. Her cyborg Virgin body, now buried in Río Escondido, testifies to her monumental achievement in transforming the town's indigenous *zoê* into full-fledged participants in the *mestizo* state.

### **Immunizing the Shrew: Negotiating Class and Gender in (Post-)Revolutionary Mexico**

Of course, technological hybridity does not automatically equate redemption in all of Fernández's works. This is especially the case regarding *The Torch*, where an influenza outbreak weakens a *zapatista* general's occupation of Cholula, thus clearing the way for federal forces to retake the town. The desperate attempt by both the general, José Juan Reyes (Armendáriz) and a North American doctor, Edward Roberts, to contain the epidemic ultimately fails. The remarkable inability of the protagonists to restore order opens up a series of questions for the scholar of Fernández's cinema. If, as many critics argue, one of “El Indio's” key motivations was

to create a distinctly Mexican cinema that affirmed the country both aesthetically and technologically, then why would he represent Mexican futility in a movie targeted at a North American audience? This may be in part because the director can blame the American doctor. The failure of Roberts's medicine to immunize the town from disease reflects the fact that overdependence on foreign actors—even medical doctors—impedes the creation of national technological and cultural hybridity. The healthcare element in *The Torch* sheds light on the biopolitical discourse of another section in this film, and also *Enamorada*, where José Juan and Miss Peñafiel (María Félix; Paulette Goddard),<sup>35</sup> an aristocratic woman from the town's richest family, cure each other of their transgressions of proper gender and socioeconomic performativities through love.

Despite their narrative similarities, both *Enamorada* and *The Torch* have followed very different trajectories in both the academic and the popular sectors. The former remains one of the director's most successful and canonical films,<sup>36</sup> while the latter is largely forgotten. The scant criticism that acknowledges the existence of this unsuccessful production follows Raúl Modenessi's observation that Fernández produced "an apparently frame-by-frame American remake [of *Enamorada*] [. . .] in 1950" (101; Mahieux; García Riera, *Mexico visto* 58). Part of *The Torch's* poor reception results from its stilted dialogue and generally weak performances. This is especially obvious with Goddard, a Hollywood actress who, despite previous success, was at this point in the twilight of her career (Mahieux). This actress's interpretation of a young, aristocratic Mexican woman faced especially harsh criticism in the Mexican press (García Riera, *Emilio* 163). Rather than dwell on aesthetic considerations, however, the present study focuses on how the strangely placed medical emergency in the middle of *The Torch* elucidates the parallel immunological discourses regarding gender and class in both films. The protagonists'

failure to overcome the flu outbreak in *The Torch* speaks to an even more urgent need to reconcile competing revolutionary factions (or communities) within Mexico, an immunological process that will come about through heterosexual romance.

I will briefly summarize both films to highlight their many similarities and key differences. In each movie, José Juan occupies Cholula and rounds up the richest men of the town. One of these is Carlos Peñafiel, an elderly man whom the *zapatista* general incarcerates. The general later meets Miss Peñafiel, Carlos's fiery daughter who is engaged to the wealthy American, Roberts.<sup>37</sup> When José Juan learns of her parentage, he orders her father's release. He tries to win Miss Peñafiel's heart, but she resists in several slapstick scenes that both critique the general's overly zealous *machismo* and her own "manly" behaviors. At one point José Juan pays a *mariachi* band to serenade Miss Peñafiel with the classic song "La malagueña," but she still does not accept him. Here the stories diverge; in *Enamorada* José Juan approaches Miss Peñafiel and declares his undying love for her in a church. In *The Torch*, however, the general sees a coughing man—whose *sarape* codes him as indigenous—fall dead to the ground. This man is the first of many victims of Spanish flu. José Juan, Miss Peñafiel, and her fiancé try unsuccessfully to contain the epidemic. After this divergent segment, the film returns to the storyline from *Enamorada*. The *zapatista* general learns that federal troops will attack the city, and rather than unnecessarily risk lives, he sounds a retreat. Miss Peñafiel, who is about to take marital vows with the American, learns of the general's decision and leaves her fiancé for the revolutionary.

These movies open themselves up to distinct analytical readings precisely because Fernández directs them at such different audiences. Almost all of the criticism situates *Enamorada* within didactic, officialist expressions of *mexicanidad*, nation building, and proper gender roles. These studies view the romance between José Juan and Miss Peñafiel as an

allegory for national reconciliation along the lines of a nineteenth century foundational fiction (de la Mora 155; Mraz 114; Mahiux).<sup>38</sup> Such readings become necessarily complicated when applied to *The Torch* because Fernández probably did not aim to instill *mexicanidad* in his US audience. At the very most he may have attempted to foment transnational dialogue, while at the least he may have exploited Mexican stereotypes in hopes of success at the box office.

Nevertheless, this remake's explicit treatment of physical immunization can help resolve contradictory readings of *Enamorada*. For example, Jean Franco asserts that the film—which is based on Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*—celebrates José Juan's domination of Miss Peñafiel as a restoration of the patriarchal values of the Revolution (*Plotting Women* 149).

Tierney diverges from this reading by positing the film as a screwball comedy that focuses on love's "feminizing" effect on José Juan, thus undermining official doctrines of gender (105-08).

Rather than argue about whether the film sees *machismo* or tomboy behavior as the main antagonist to progress, it is more useful to question how the film attempts to correct both characters' shortcomings regarding gender performativity.<sup>39</sup> The immunization paradigm proves especially useful in navigating the gender contradictions that occur throughout.

The lead characters' heterosexual romance also facilitates a deeper immunization against socioeconomic, racial, and political discrimination. The need for national reconciliation is especially obvious through the performance of José Juan, who, during different junctures of the film dresses as a *zapatista*, a *federal*, and a *villista*.<sup>40</sup> According to Mraz:

The crucial officialist myth of the Mexican Revolution is that it is a struggle of the 'good guys'—Zapata, Villa, Carranza, Madero, and Obregón—against the 'bad guys,' Porfirio Díaz and Victoriano Huerta. Fernández replicates the official line and, in accordance with his essentialist and ahistorical vision, goes it one

better by conflating Zapatismo, Villismo, and the Federal Army through the device of Juan José's uniforms. (115-16)

Fernández's clearly intentional costuming, then, constructs a revolutionary communion that seeks to immunize the nation against the disagreements of the different actors of the Revolution. Even "good guys" are imperfect; José Juan's excessive brutality, for example, both alludes to his *machismo* and his uncompromising *zapatismo*, a movement whose demands of "tierra y libertad" came across as anarchic to most PRI officials. His original hatred for the rich, evidenced by his decision to arrest Carlos Peñafiel, subsides as he becomes romantically interested in a woman from the upper class. In a similar fashion, Miss Peñafiel constantly reminds her suitor of his poverty, but her prejudices also fade away as she acquiesces to his advances. Thus the film immunizes its protagonists—and their future progeny—against the twin devils of bourgeois self-righteousness and proletarian/peasant envy.

The allegorical reconciliation of the love story also informs our reading of the health crisis in *The Torch*, where, beyond highlighting the American doctor's failures, Fernández also uses immunological discourses to overcome the threats of internal political polarization. Given the disjointed relationship of this segment to the rest of the film, it feels as if the director tried to force an epidemic into the story. Because this was one of only a few films he directed in the US, and considering his obsession with (particularly rural) healthcare, this certainly may be the case. Regardless of Fernández's reason for including a flu outbreak in his film, the very existence of disease opens this segment of the film up to immunological readings. This is especially the case in light of Carlos Tabernero Holgado and Enrique Perdiguero-Gil's assertion that Spanish flu in this film represents "el peligro de desestructuración de las comunidades humanas." Viewed in this light, the reactions of the film's protagonists are especially interesting; the main characters

lend their unique skills to the cause of containment, and in this way help maintain order. The general decrees martial law, threatening to charge any individual who leaves the town with treason, and attempts to quarantine the sick. Miss Peñafiel donates her family's fine linens for a makeshift hospital, and Roberts puts together a hurried vaccination campaign. However, we soon see that US intervention in Mexican states of emergency do not resolve the problems at hand.

Fernández alludes to the US's own imperfect healthcare system by setting this film during the 1918 flu epidemic that many argue killed more people than did the violence of the Mexican Revolution or World War I (Billings).<sup>41</sup> Rather than use diseases such as malaria or smallpox—preventable ailments that posed serious problems in mid-century Mexico and throughout Latin America (Abel 23-24; 15)—he focuses on a sickness that has continued to afflict the “developed world” well into the twenty-first century. Also, by using the historically catastrophic health crisis, he can comment on rural healthcare without calling Mexican modernity into question.<sup>42</sup> One key distinction between the successful immunizations of *Río Escondido* and the failures here is that the post-revolutionary government, particularly the SEP and the Secretaría de Salubridad Pública, has no role in the effort. The fact that the American doctor fails where the state will later triumph—at least according to films like *Río Escondido*—promotes a mythos of homegrown Mexican modernity that need not depend on foreign validation.

Given their respective roles in the crisis, we should consider Roberts, Miss Peñafiel, and José Juan as allegorical representations of their national, racial, and classed communities. This is not a major stretch given that most of the criticism on *Enamorada* already views the love story in such a light. Of course, within the context of a national emergency the symbolic nature of each character necessarily changes. This is especially true with José Juan, who transcends the role of



poor *zapatista* and becomes the town's political authority. Miss Peñafiel once again represents Mexico's moneyed upper class whose foreignness is obvious from the American actress's performance. For his part, Roberts represents US technological and medical aid. Although they work together to contain the outbreak, their ultimate failure challenges the overly simplistic notion that cross-class and transnational cooperation alone hold the keys to Mexican progress. That said, the epidemic forces the bourgeoisie and the peasantry—who are associated with the *carrancistas* and *zapatistas* respectively—to work together and recognize their “proper” roles within the institutionalized revolution. Miss Peñafiel, rather than use her money to escape the crisis, stays in Cholula. As she tears her fine sheets to succor the sick, she moves beyond the stereotypical, self-interested bourgeois woman and becomes a key contributor to the national good. The disease decimates José Juan's forces, and he realizes that, while he has good ideals, he is not the best political leader, a fact that implicitly validates the more conservative *carrancistas* who would eventually come to power. The disease humbles both characters, and by extension their class and political ideology, thus opening a space for national reconciliation.

José Juan controls the town with an iron-fist as he and Roberts team up using techniques not unlike those of don Regino in *Río Escondido*. For example, José Juan both decrees that everyone receive medical immunizations and that they not leave the town. Certainly he is no *cacique*, and he is trying to act in the best interest of his town, but when compared to the post-revolutionary state's vaccination efforts in *Río Escondido*, the *zapatista*'s work is certainly incompetent. After his decree, the desperate inhabitants of the town line up like machines on an assembly-line to receive their vaccinations. Even after achieving technological hybridity, however, many people still come down with the illness. This is probably due to the fact that “drift” and “shift” mutations in flu viruses make vaccinations difficult to engineer (CDC).

Despite this technical explanation, the film demystifies US foreign aid, a fact that is especially significant given that the film is directed at a US audience. “El Indio” is careful not to question the good intentions of his North American protagonist; as Mahiux notes, Roberts is not an enemy. His failure does not come from his lack of character, but because the circumstances overwhelm his finite abilities.

Fernández centers the terrible effects of the disease in Mexico on Adelita, José Juan’s adopted daughter. Critics such as Tierney have observed the gentle relationship between the general and this little girl in *Enamorada*, arguing that it hints at “cracks in his macho image” as the film begins (Tierney 110). Tierney’s observations resonate even more in the remake, where “El Indio” greatly expands the girl’s role. After the influenza outbreak, José Juan orders her to stay home at all times. However, the girl takes ill and Roberts cannot cure her. The last that we see of the girl is a scene in which the local priest prays for her as she lies on her deathbed. Adelita’s demise is especially poignant when viewed alongside post-revolutionary ideologies and foundational fictions, both of which emphasize the potential to regenerate the nation through one’s posterity. Adelita, then, is another allegorical character and her death signals lost potential that even an alliance with the US could not resolve. When viewed alongside successful immunizations in films like *Río Escondido*, Adelita’s death attests to the need for the state to create its own competent medical programs.

The immunological discourse of this film is especially enlightening when viewed alongside Lamarckian genetics. One would think that the modernizing changes to the bodies of the people of Cholula would immunize them against disease and initiate them into official *mestizaje*. However, the doctor’s medicating acts create technologically hybrid subjects that are explicitly coded as foreign. Although the state certainly fetishizes hybridity, it wishes for racial

and cultural mixtures that occur among Mexicans of different races and social strata. Roberts's immunological failures are obvious during the flu epidemic, but they are more subtle—yet more central to both films—in his (failed) attempts to cure Miss Peñafiel of her “manliness.” “El Indio” shows this character's weakness shortly after Carlos's arrest. Miss Peñafiel holds a shotgun (a revolver in *Enamorada*) in an excessively phallic manner, and shouts that she will kill José Juan herself if Roberts will not intervene. Roberts takes the gun and places it under the couch, telling her to calm down, but Miss Peñafiel simply grabs the firearm again. This scene both speaks to Miss Peñafiel's manly behavior and to Roberts's impotence in reigning in her feisty spirit.

Not until she runs up against the strong *machismo* of the general will she act in a more socially acceptable manner. Mraz asserts that this man “beat[s] her into submission” (114); we will have to qualify his statement to recognize that Miss Peñafiel also uses violence against the general. In one scene, for example, she throws a lighted firecracker under his horse that, upon exploding, sends him flying through the air. That said, Mraz's observation brings the physical nature of both characters' domestication to the fore. Within the framework of Lamarckism, José Juan's fists and Miss Peñafiel's “coarseness”—both effects of improper gender performativity—become the medicines that genetically cure each other of their performative shortcomings. Similar to how a medical vaccination uses a potentially dangerous strand of a virus to build the body's resistance (Esposito, *Bíos* 50), both characters employ their social “diseases” to produce the films' only successful immunization(s). The combination of José Juan and Miss Peñafiel produces a synergetic union in which the combination of both characters creates an entity—modern Mexican subjects—whose strength is greater than the sum of its parts. The romantic interests do not immunize each other on their own; instead they must go through Father Sierra,

the local priest (Fernando Fernández in *Enamorada*; Gilbert Roland in *The Torch*). Franco notes that in *Enamorada* (and by extension *The Torch*), “religion, in the person of the androgynous and classless priest, becomes the only logical mediator between the landowning class and the new revolutionary leadership, and between the sexes” (*Plotting Women* 149).<sup>43</sup> In the scene where José Juan arrests Miss Peñafiel’s father, the priest implores the general not to act rashly. This is his first of many attempts to temper the general’s overzealous aggression and *machismo*, and he has similar conversations with Miss Peñafiel about her manliness. Despite initially opposing a romantic relationship between the two characters, the priest constantly acts as an intermediary between them; after comedic confrontations that leave both fuming at the other, it is the priest who helps them recognize their own faults.

None of the current criticism has explicitly mentioned how Father Sierra’s role in facilitating the protagonists’ compatibility underlies his immunological function in the town as a whole. Separate meetings between the priest and each of the suitors in a room behind the chapel help him in this endeavor. Here the priest sees José Juan’s soft side as the general moves a picture of the wisemen bowing before the Christ child to a spot where it will catch the sunlight. Several critics note that part of José Juan’s affinity with the painting is that, upon learning that the painter’s name was Juárez, he mistakenly thinks of the anticlerical president (Franco, *Plotting Women* 150; Tierney *Emilio Fernández* 116). For Franco, this shows how representation can “mediate conflicts” because the priest later mentions José Juan’s reverence for the painting when, in a fit of rage, Miss Peñafiel shouts that she wishes she were a man so that she could hit the general; after hearing the priest’s words, the girl realizes that “lower classes might harbor ‘noble’ feelings” (*Plotting Women* 150). Tierney, on the other hand, argues that José Juan—who views himself as a revolutionary, redemptive figure—realizes that he has only achieved this

status through violence, and this painting shows him that he needs to lead with the humility of the Christ-child (*Emilio Fernández* 116-17). What both analyses miss is that it is ultimately the priest, through the painting, who facilitates Miss Peñafiel's immunization from her sentiments of socioeconomic superiority (and unladylike performativity) and José Juan from his misplaced *machismo*. Only after their conversations with the spiritual leader soften them can the lovers immunize one another.

The general—admittedly with “divine” assistance—immunizes Miss Peñafiel (and vice versa) where his American antagonist has failed. Thus the director asserts shared nationality, rather than social class, as the key variable in determining a couple's compatibility. Viewed in this light, “foundational fictions” such as *Enamorada* and *The Torch* represent, at their core, an interesting articulation of Esposito's immunization paradigm because it is through heterosexual union that the state defends its individuals from the dangers of the *communitas*. Notably, neither José Juan nor Miss Peñafiel represent *zoê* in *Enamorada* or *The Torch*; instead both embody two separate *bios* communities that cannot peacefully coexist without negotiating their relationship one with another. The strategy that these films choose, then, is that of fusing the two together and creating a single hybrid, immunized community. Their shared national identity, coupled with the Church's approval, explains why José Juan can immunize his romantic interest where the more highly educated foreign suitor has failed. The key to this stage of nation building is not the establishment of transnational economic ties between elites, but the reconciliation of Mexico's rich and poor.

José Juan calls on Miss Peñafiel's family after releasing Carlos. In stark contrast to Roberts's weakness, when he knocks on the door, both he and Miss Peñafiel flirtatiously insult one another. Tierney states that this scene creates the violence and instability of the *screwball*

comedy that was a staple of 1940s Hollywood films, especially as it exemplifies “the exchange of comic banter where both Miss Peñafiel and José Juan call each other names or trick each other with language” (115). At one point Miss Peñafiel gets José Juan to put his ear to the door and then she hits it with a wooden log. In retaliation, the general pretends to walk away, Miss Peñafiel puts her ear to the door, and the general kicks it, saying “eso le enseñará que las mujeres son como los ratones; siempre caen en la trampa por curiosas!” Jairo Antonio Hoyos Galvis notes that José Juan’s (apparently) feminine curiosity hurt him only moments earlier, which attests to the film’s gender fluidity. When Miss Peñafiel hits the general after he acts in an “effeminate,” “gossipy” manner, she becomes the male, with the log in her hand becoming an overtly phallic representation of her adoption of *macho* performativity. At the same time, her act underscores the contradictory nature of *machismo*, where men frequently exhibit the same traits that they criticize in women. More pertinently, the couples’ mutual antagonism paradoxically signals them as compatible; indeed, even their differences make them into better Mexicans.

No healthy relationship can depend solely on a mutual predisposition toward violence. When José Juan punches both Miss Peñafiel and Father Sierra outside of the church, he later decides he must apologize not with simple words, but with a live rendition of “La malagueña.” This scene was clearly meant for María Félix, whose signature eyebrows embodied the strong personality that she exuded on the screen; as such, Goddard’s performance is particularly dissatisfying in *The Torch*. Many critics assert that Figueora takes some of the most striking shots ever recorded of la Doña (Paranaguá “María Félix”; Miller). However, Figueora does not content himself with merely capturing the actress; instead, in both films, he goes from seeing her eyes to seeing *with* her eyes. For example, he employs numerous high-angle, nearly overhead shots of Armendáriz as he stands below her balcony and several much softer high-angles of the

photographs of Roberts in her bedroom. These shots clearly communicate José Juan's social inferiority as the camera angle, and hence Miss Peñafiel's eyes, diminishes his presence on the screen. Furthermore, because she can see "without being seen" (Tierney 111), Miss Peñafiel is the active agent in this encounter. The general's passivity is especially noteworthy; he must rely on other men to sing for him in falsetto, which emphasizes his status as a "soften[ed]" *macho* (Franco, *Plotting Women* 151). One small difference between the films in this segment is that Goddard throws an empty piggy bank down at José Juan to remind him of his poverty. In *Enamorada*, María Félix's character says no words, but it is obvious that the general has won her heart.

Despite the song's effect, the upper-class Miss Peñafiel does not agree to leave her American suitor until Father Sierra announces—moments before the wedding ceremony—that General José Juan Reyes will not stand against the oncoming federal troops. This scene carries a very different discursive punch in each film; Fernández teases his US audience by subverting a common trope from westerns and letting the Mexican—rather than the American—get the girl.<sup>44</sup> He trumpets the Mexican suitor's success in *Enamorada* as well, but because he aims this one at a Mexican audience, it is perhaps more cathartic than resistant. Mraz argues that a central tenant of *Enamorada*—and perhaps both films—is that "*gringos* may be good at money, but Mexicans are better at love" (114). Before leaving Roberts at the altar, Miss Peñafiel inadvertently breaks a pearl necklace that her suitor has given her as a wedding gift. In *Enamorada* she takes a *sarape* from her indigenous servant before exiting the home. Notably, in *The Torch* she also breaks the necklace, but she does not put on a *sarape*. This scene is especially key in *Enamorada* as it marks Miss Peñafiel's initiation into *mestizo* Mexico. Until this moment she has been both racially and culturally *criolla*; however, here she eschews European jewelry and chooses instead

to wear the traditionally indigenous garb. Within Lamarckian thought, she has genetically transformed herself into a *mestiza*, and any children she bears will inherit these same qualities. As such, she has forsaken her racial and socioeconomic privilege in favor of greater social justice. Interestingly, she has only learned how to empathize with her fellow citizens as she has adopted more appropriate gender performativity. This suggests that she only undergoes change after meeting the *zapatista* general because he represents ties to her country that Roberts will never have. By joining José Juan in his retreat she abandons a good, but incompatible, foreign man who has been constantly unable to cure her of her performative shortcomings.

When focusing on Miss Peñafiel's immunization, we must take care not to ignore the changes in José Juan as well. At the film's beginning, the male protagonist is both *machista* and nonnegotiable. This is not to say that Fernández would count him among the "malos mexicanos," but his hardline views do not work in a modern, post-revolutionary—and especially post-*cardenista*—state. As Miss Peñafiel has cured him of his *machismo* he has become more reasonable; he will never abandon his beliefs, but he also will not spill unnecessary blood defending them. As part of the national reconciliation that we see here, he realizes that he should recognize the conditions on the ground when defending his beliefs; because he could not win in a fight against the *federales*, he chooses to flee rather than die. Ironically, this decision means that the general's ideals can continue through his posterity despite their military defeat. The couple's continued centrality within the Mexican nation-state comes through filmically in the closing shot, which employs the typical big skies, curvilinear perspective, low-angle, and the iconic Popocatepetl. José Juan sits in the center of the shot on his horse, and Miss Peñafiel walks by his side, her hand subserviently on his steed's rump. Franco views this as the reestablishment of proper gender roles (*Plotting Women* 152), while Tierney argues that it represents a "mutual



escape from a world in which they do not belong” (*Emilio Fernández* 117-18). Despite their differences, both allude to the fact that the film optimistically suggests that, left to their own devices, this couple will reproduce a new society and regenerate the race.

The lovers’ reproductive potential rings especially clear as we consider Adelita’s erasure from each film’s narrative. In *Enamorada*, the girl does not ride alongside her father—which seems strange given that the general claims that he always takes her with him when they travel. Of course, *The Torch* explains the girl’s disappearance by including her death during the epidemic. Adelita’s absence is key because the presence of an adopted child would undermine the portrayal of the union between the *zapatista* general and the aristocratic young woman as a foundational fiction. This does not erase the tragic nature of Adelita’s death in *The Torch*. The fact that a flu virus kills her attests to the need for better access to healthcare in rural areas, and her death is a great loss. However, her passing is paradoxically necessary for the immunization of gender and the reconciliation between classes that occurs in the love story between José Juan and Miss Peñafiel. What is more, this scene shows that the nation’s eugenic redemption must go beyond hygiene and also resolve the conflicts between people of different social strata through heterosexual romance. Fernández signals his protagonists’ union as the nation’s future as they move through the authentically Mexican landscape. Perhaps Spanish Flu has hurt the *zapatistas* in *The Torch*, but the relationship between Miss Peñafiel and José Juan produces a social immunization that opens a space for national reconciliation.

## Conclusion

With the possible exception of the muralists, no artists shaped national identity more profoundly than the duo of Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa, whose melodramas educated

generations as to what *mexicanidad* meant in the post-revolutionary state. This chapter has extended the scholarship on “El Indio” by showing how the director inscribed modernizing discourses on the bodies of his subjects. In the context of official policies that used hygiene and education to change the indigenous genome, it should come as no surprise that the director’s didactic cinema would postulate the fusion of the body with technology as a symbol of official *mestizaje*. The use of posthuman theory—particularly Esposito’s immunization paradigm and cyborgology—has exposed new ways to view *indigenismo*, *mestizaje*, and the cultural missions. Fernández’s films express numerous paradoxes—like cyborg Virgins whose potential to undermine pre-revolutionary interpellations of the body comes from their adherence to traditional performativity—that reflect the implicit tensions of any “official,” homogenizing identity. The analysis of *Enamorada/The Torch* further complicates Fernández’s view on rural hygiene because in this movie medication does not immunize Mexican bodies against medical threats, nor does it initiate them into the *mestizo* state. Here proper hybridization will only occur through the reproduction of a new Mexican subject through heterosexual romance across class and racial lines. The immunological discourse of these films alludes to a morally ambivalent tension in which the state aims to carry out internal imperialism (*Río Escondido*; *María Candelaria*) while at the same time denouncing foreign imperialism (*Enamorada*; *The Torch*). As the Golden Age came to a close and masked *luchadores* replaced *charros* and revolutionaries as the main protagonists of the silver screen, Mexican cinema would emphasize this colonial ambivalence to an even greater degree.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although the Mexican national cinema attempted to distinguish itself from Hollywood, it depended largely on US markets—particularly Latino viewers in the US—for its commercial success. See Maricruz Castro Ricalde and Robert McKee Irwin (265).

<sup>2</sup> Ceridwen Rhiannon Higgans argues that Figueroa used physical space to produce racial discourses (122-27), a technique that was especially useful in a post-revolutionary society that placed land rights at the top of its agenda.

<sup>3</sup> A document I uncovered in the SEP archives shows that Mexican officials consciously emulated fascist Italy's propaganda in its own attempt to construct a national identity (*Ideas generales* 1-2).

<sup>4</sup> Julia Tuñón observes that “El crecimiento urbano de México implicó la crisis del campo. Parecería que el sistema nacional no permite un desarrollo simultáneo de ambos, que son excluyentes, y el campo quedó depauperado con el avance del siglo, mientras la ciudad crecía en forma caótica” (“Ritos”). Furthermore, she notes an ambiguous nature to Fernández's films because he approached this tension from an officialist perspective. See Tuñón (“Ritos”).

<sup>5</sup> Emilio García Riera documents *María Candelaria*'s incredible success in France, particularly at the Cannes Film Festival (*Emilio* 55-59). He also notes the film's surprising ability to unite Spanish critics from the right and left (*Emilio* 59).

<sup>6</sup> Julia Tuñón argues that “El Indio” received most of his inspiration, particularly regarding *indigenismo* and indigenous rights, from *cardenismo*, so much of his work was anachronistic even before he filmed it (“Emilio Fernández” 182-84).

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Agostini observes that the state equated hygiene with modernity at least as far

back as the *Porfiriato* (461). Indeed, María Rosa Gudiño-Cejudo, Laura Magaña-Valladares, and Mauricio Hernández Ávila note that one of the major complaints against the *Porfiriato* at the beginning of the Revolution was the state's failure to extend medical care to the rural sector, which led many to believe the country needed a more modern government (84).

<sup>8</sup> Despite the anti-authoritarian sentiment of Revolutionary and post-revolutionary Mexico, Nuevo León congressman and Director of the Consejo Superior de Salubridad, José María Rodríguez stated that the “dictadura sanitaria” was “la única que toleran los pueblos civilizados” (310). Furthermore, he asserted that the state had the obligation to intervene when national health hung in the balance.

<sup>9</sup> Several critics classify only *María Candelaria*, *La perla*, and *Maclovía* as *indigenista* (Tierney 75; Martínez Gómez 271). Despite its omission, *Río Escondido* is perhaps Fernández's most *indigenista* film of all because it explicitly preaches indigenous redemption and assimilation. Numerous other critics see *Río Escondido* as the filmic response to Diego Rivera's muralism precisely because of the movie's *indigenista* discourse. See Carlos García Benítez, (“Constructing”); Tuñón (“Emilio Fernández” 185); García Riera (*Emilio* 108-09; 121).

<sup>10</sup> My interpretation of the medicalized body as an entity that disrupts the reigning body politics is especially valid as we consider Chris Hables Gray's definition of the cyborg as any body that “has been technologically modified in any significant way, from an implanted pacemaker to a vaccination that reprogrammed [its] immune system” (2).

<sup>11</sup> “El Indio's” films recognize *criollo* and *mestizo caciques* who oppose official modernizing projects as an existential threat to Mexico.

<sup>12</sup> Ana Flisser notes that the Mexican population rose from 13 million in 1900 to 105 million in 2005. She attributes this incredible growth in large part to improved healthcare that

reached more people (356). Thus the idea of modernizing the bodies of the nation led to a larger number of bodies in the nation.

<sup>13</sup> Adriana Pacheco notes that one aspect of Golden Age cinema was its paradoxical invocation of such contradictory ideals as “progreso, modernización, populismo, anticlericalismo, catolicismo y guadalupismo” (33).

<sup>14</sup> Carlos Monsiváis argues that the “dazzling beauty” of María Félix and Dolores del Río set them apart from their peers (“Mythologies” 123). One especially fascinating fact about these women is that their effect continues to this day. Niamh Thornton shows that these “Mexican Divas”’ transnational appeal continues to this day on the internet (57-65). It is especially interesting that, given their glamor, these two stars would embody the Virgin.

<sup>15</sup> Castro Ricalde and Irwin report that del Río took the part of María Candelaria to convince her fellow Mexicans that, despite a successful career in Hollywood, she was still willing to play a character that embodied Mexicanness (92-94).

<sup>16</sup> J. Andrew Brown observes a particularly strong tendency for cyborgs in Mexican and Latin American literary and cultural production to attempt to recuperate a lost gender (43-76).

<sup>17</sup> Tierney correctly asserts that “El Indio” uses lighting to accentuate the whiteness of both María Candelaria and Lorenzo Rafael (90); however, her observations—especially with regards to María Candelaria as the daughter of a prostitute—do not preclude possibilities of white ancestry.

<sup>18</sup> One of the problems that hygiene officials faced was that many indigenous people simply did not want to be vaccinated. As a result, Agostini notes that the government turned both to force and persuasion in its attempts to convince its people to receive such treatments (463-65). As a SEP-funded film, *María Candelaria* clearly aims to persuade its viewers to sympathize with

official attempts to medicate the nation.

<sup>19</sup> According to Fernando Mino Gracia, Diego Rivera severely criticized Fernández for postulating an indigenous population with bourgeois values; however, the artist probably erred on the side of essentialization (122). We should bear in mind that Fernández aimed to produce mythic, and not necessarily “true,” discourses regarding Mexican indigeneity.

<sup>20</sup> The fact that Fernández champions an indigenous spirituality is especially interesting given that it was generally *hispanistas* who attributed a spiritual value to the Latin component of *mestizo* identity. See Swarthout (89).

<sup>21</sup> Higgins suggests a degree of anti-*alemanismo* in *Río Escondido* when he argues that “the film’s overt message, that government initiatives in education and health are progressive forces through which to unite the nation, is rendered insignificant in the barren streets of Río Escondido and the brutally stark landscape that lies beneath Figueroa’s fearful, rainless clouds” (140). Although García Riera states that the film shows “El Indio’s” “gran fe” in *alemanismo*, he also notes that the Alemán administration almost blocked its release (*Emilio* 108).

<sup>22</sup> See also García Benítez (“Construcción”) and Hershfield (*Mexican Cinema* 61) for more studies that corroborate Mora’s readings.

<sup>23</sup> Tierney asserts that the existence of *caciquismo* in *Río Escondido* “becomes an allegorical way of referring to corrupt power structures facilitated by Alemán” (151).

<sup>24</sup> Segre’s argument responds, at least in part, to Tierney’s assertion that the film is critical of the government when she asks “why would a system of social reform send a civilian woman [. . .] to do a job that is quite clearly the responsibility of the Government and Government institutions (the police, the army, the courts)?” (157).

<sup>25</sup> One may argue that Fernández’s representation of 1940s Mexico diverges from a

reality in which Alemán gutted educational spending in favor of business (Niblo 222-24). When viewed in this light, the film becomes a highly critical attack against Alemán's education policy.

<sup>26</sup> Rosaura performs many of the duties that all *maestros rurales* carried out. According to Alan Knight, "throughout Mexico, they [rural teachers] were to encourage regular bathing; vaccination; correct prenatal care; short haircuts; the use of individual beds, tables, and drinking glasses (el vaso individual); and the separation of humans and animals (who habitually slept together)" (413).

<sup>27</sup> Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz argues that the beginning sequence of *Río Escondido* "articulat[es] three theses: that there is a historical-cultural bias to the Revolution, that public education is important in helping that project adhere together, and finally, that the national cultural establishment [. . .] played a substantial role in ensuring the success of that project" (24). Daniel Chávez argues that the film serves as a point of nationalistic intersection for muralism, film, nationalist music, and even nationalist comic books ("Alta modernidad" 163). For her part, Tuñón states that "the murals of the Secretaría de Educación Pública have a voice of their own [. . .] and reproach her for her tardiness" ("Emilio Fernández" 185).

<sup>28</sup> Rivera would later credit *Río Escondido* with popularizing his work within the popular sectors of the Communist Bloc. See García Riera (*Emilio* 109).

<sup>29</sup> Ana M. López argues that, far from opening new spaces for female performativity, Félix's type-cast characters are "simply the vampiresque flip-side of the saintly mothers of the family melodramas" (450). Whether or not this allowed for greater female agency, numerous critics have noted the synergetic relationship between how she performed on the screen and in her private life. See Ocasio (274); Castro Ricalde and Irwin (233-34); Ana Pizarro ("Divas"); Susan Wiebe Drake (3).

<sup>30</sup> Elena Jackson Albarrán observes that “schools represented the most visible outposts of the revolutionary regime in many rural communities, and allowed for the exchange of ideas among local authorities, parents, and schoolteachers” (49). In a very real sense, “El Indio’s” films themselves, as SEP-funded texts, functioned as mobile schools that could reach people who otherwise would have lived beyond the reach of the state.

<sup>31</sup> Aréchiga Córdoba notes that the 1917 Constitution promised healthcare and education to all. Beyond their ideological role, these were two new constitutionally mandated state actors as well (“Educación” 57-58).

<sup>32</sup> Sandra Messinger Cypess reminds us that the trope of la Malinche pertains to all Mexican women regardless of race (*Malinche* 155). Thus Mercedes’s equation with this figure is more gendered than raced.

<sup>33</sup> Joshua Lund sees Benito Juárez as an excellent example of cultural *mestizaje*. He illustrates this point when he describes the former president as “an Indian *de pura raza* with a secular outlook, a uniquely Mexican visage with a severe European haircut, comfortably clothed in a black frock suit, morning vest, and bow tie” (ix-x).

<sup>34</sup> The scene in which Felipe implores the women to boil their water reflects the state’s aim to change the eating habits of the lower classes and the nation’s indigenous. See Sandra Aguilar Rodríguez (“Cooking” 182). For an in-depth study on how the state attempted to overcome the sanitary challenges in rural areas see Aguilar Rodríguez (“Alimentando”).

<sup>35</sup> In this section I refer to José Juan’s love interest as Miss Peñafiel because she is named Beatriz in *Enamorada* and María Dolores in *The Torch*.

<sup>36</sup> García Riera notes that *Enamorada* was in theatres for seven weeks, and that it held its own against the highly successful *Cantinflas. Soy un prófugo* (*Emilio* 193).



<sup>37</sup> Miss Peñafiel's North American fiancé is an engineer named Eduardo Roberts in *Enamorada* and a medic named Edward Roberts in *The Torch*. In both cases the character represents US scientific prowess and the money that accompanies it.

<sup>38</sup> Doris Sommer views heterosexual romantic relationships in Latin American fiction as allegories for nation-building, modernization, and the reconciliation of various sectors of society. For an effective overview of her thought, see Sommer (30-51).

<sup>39</sup> Viviane Mahieux argues that Tierney's reading fits within Sommer's thought, where figures of "feminized" masculinity frequently help resolve internal conflicts. See also Sommer (87-88).

<sup>40</sup> Perhaps due to misgivings about the man who infamously invaded New Mexico, the director never films José Juan dressed as a *villista* in *The Torch*.

<sup>41</sup> Robert McCaa contests the assertion that influenza caused more deaths than any other factor during the decade of the Revolution. He observes that the most heavily affected areas were precisely those that had suffered the most severe violence, and, equally interesting, he sees an "abnormally low level of deaths in the year following." In the end, he ties the rise in violence to weaker mortality rates from 1910-1920. See McCaa ("Missing Millions").

<sup>42</sup> Guillermo Fajardo Ortiz and Rey Arturo Salcedo Álvarez observe that, due to the success of the 1930s rural health campaigns and their focus on antibiotics, vaccinations, and insecticides, the number of deaths from preventable diseases in Mexico had dropped by the mid-century. At this point, the country began dealing with other health problems that are more traditionally associated with more advanced societies (S11). In *The Torch*, Fernández had to be careful not to undermine this great Mexican achievement before his US audience, so he picked a safer target both by placing the epidemic in the past and by choosing something that was

devastating in the US as well.

<sup>43</sup> When viewed within the context of the Cristero War, the priest's own taming becomes especially important as well.

<sup>44</sup> Tierney argues that *Enamorada* is, in part, a rebuttal of the mainstream theme of Hollywood westerns where the *gringo* would always get the girl (*Emilio* 117). This element is even more salient in *The Torch*, where the intended audience was now North American.

### Chapter 3

#### **Waving Aside the *Letrado*: Mimetic Imperialism in Mexploitation and *La onda***

The events of October 2, 1968 marked the climax of numerous confrontations between a series of student-led manifestations and a post-revolutionary government that fetishized the appearance of modernity. In the weeks preceding the Olympic games—which Mexico would proudly host—several demonstrations erupted that demanded the release of political prisoners and the institution of a truly democratic regime (Preston and Dillon 65-66; Paz 247). Realizing that the student movement undermined government attempts to present itself favorably, the PRI and President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz decided to “stop at nothing to project an image of stability and modernity” (Joseph and Henderson 553). On that fateful night, the government deployed military forces with the ostensible task of restoring “law and order,” which effectively meant silencing the embarrassing manifestations through violence if necessary. The army surrounded an unarmed demonstration at the *Plaza de las tres culturas* in Tlatelolco and started shooting. Hundreds of students were killed and injured, while so-called “friendly fire” hit several soldiers. Ironically for the politicians who ordered the massacre, this unjustified use of force undermined the PRI’s legitimacy more than all of the previous student demonstrations combined (Poniatowska 171).

Despite a dominant narrative that posits Tlatelolco as a singular moment in a conflict limited to students and the military, state brutality went much deeper. As early as 1959, PRI leaders had crushed the Ferrocarriles Nacionales railroad strike and arrested union leaders (Preston and Dillon 65; Sergei 2295-97). In the decade following the events at Tlatelolco, President Luis Echeverría ordered paramilitary strikes against peaceful student demonstrations

that left twenty-nine dead, and his government later “disappeared” hundreds of rebels (Preston and Dillon 88-89). Because government forces acted in defense of the modernity-driven, capitalistic *mestizo* state, these cases of state violence—which stretched across numerous presidencies—constituted internal imperialism even though the victims belonged mostly to the racial and ethnic majority.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the state carried out these attacks to gain favor with Western powers like the United States and to discourage foreign meddling in the country’s affairs.<sup>2</sup> Thus *mestizo* Mexico was both a champion and a victim of imperial projects. The notion of being both oppressor and oppressed comes through in many mid-century Mexican discourses, but it is especially salient in 1960s and 1970s science fiction (SF) and horror. Indeed, SF is an especially fertile venue from which to observe the intellectual treatment of official *mestizaje* because it appears both in lettered discourses and in countercultural texts that undermine many of the most sacred tenets of the post-revolutionary state. In the pages that follow I view Carlos Olvera’s 1968 novel *Mejicanos en el espacio* alongside the Mexploitation cinema of *El Santo*, *El Enmascarado de Plata*.<sup>3</sup> The *mestizo* state’s liminal colonial position as both an imperialized and imperializing nation lies at the heart of both examples of mid-century SF. However, *Mejicanos* challenges the state while Mexploitation largely supports official discourses. Given this fact, these works exemplify the tensions that emerged between a new generation of writers and a fading lettered city that now depended on the medium of the B-movie to communicate its ideals.

This political and intellectual element to mid-century science fiction redeems many works that the academy has long ignored and even scorned. J. Andrew Brown and Elizabeth M. Ginway argue that part of Latin American SF’s historically poor reception resulted from a critical climate in the academy that favored styles like magical realism (1). Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado looks further and asserts that part of Mexican SF’s struggles resulted from the poor quality

of the work of such “unknown” authors as Olvera (113).<sup>4</sup> Similar assertions abound regarding Mexploitation cinema; Carl J. Mora only grudgingly recognizes some good from Santo’s work, mostly due to its commercial success.<sup>5</sup> However, the critic argues that this cinema suffered from a culture that sacrificed aesthetics for profit (148-49). These critiques exemplify the fact that most of the negative reactions to *Mejicanos* and Mexploitation center on these works’ supposedly low aesthetic quality. That said, innovative insights emerge as we look beyond these apparent shortcomings and instead focus on the discursive significance inherent to each.

From 1958-1981, El Santo appeared in 52 movies where he played a fictitious version of himself as a professional wrestler who spent his spare time saving Mexico from threats ranging from aliens and foreign mad scientists to La Llorona. As his character defended the country from external and internal threats, Santo upheld a narrative in which *mestizo* Mexico must defend itself from foreign imperialism even as it carries out projects of domination in its own land. In this way, Mexploitation continued the discursive—though certainly not aesthetic—tradition of the lettered cinema of the Golden Age. Olvera’s countercultural novel intellectually rebuts these lettered discourses through playful language and biting social commentary. The novel tells of a Centromexican *espaciero* who ambivalently helps the state carry out its colonial ambitions in space; however, the United States constantly undermines any notions of Centromexican prestige and modernity throughout the novel. Olvera’s text ultimately asserts that the state’s drive for empire validates the very colonial hierarchies that continue to relegate Mexico—both indigenous and *mestizo*—to the periphery. As the films and the novel employ the literary devices of science fiction to make antithetical claims about the morality of Mexico’s programs of internal imperialism, they allude to the tension between lettered and countercultural texts that emerged in the 1960s (Franco, *Decline and Fall* 195-99). At stake was the role that literature, film, and

other forms of cultural production should play (if any) in shaping national politics and imaginaries. Mexploitation attempted to inculcate official, lettered doctrines in its viewers, while countercultural works like *Mejicanos* generally contented themselves with undermining the values of the state from outside the political center.

The combination of an irreverent, playful narrative voice with a political referent of unchecked internal imperialism allows *Mejicanos* to powerfully challenge lettered ideals. The novel's style leads Gabriel Trujillo Muñoz to place it in the tradition of *la onda*, thus positioning Olvera alongside figures like José Agustín, Gustavo Sainz, Margarita Dalton, and Pariménides García Saldaña (*Biografías* 170). Olvera's inclusion in this movement also associates him with the countercultural youth movements that challenged the 1960s PRI through playful language, a new morality, and biting criticism (Chiu-Olivares 13-16). Seen in this light, it is no surprise that *Mejicanos* intellectually engages the state by turning official, lettered doctrines upside down. Most criticism has asserted that the events of Tlatelolco led to the novel's relegation to ignominy (López Castro 122). This is especially unfortunate because the novel so clearly enunciates the complaints that students were voicing even as the text was being written and published.<sup>6</sup> The novel clearly questions statist articulations of national identity. Olvera's protagonist, who hails from the nation of Centroméjico, satirically portrays his country's embarrassingly incompetent attempts to emulate US imperialism. Beyond the comedic element to his work, the novel emphasizes that state-sanctioned imperial projects lead to "human" rights violations, particularly within the Martian population that the country dominates.<sup>7</sup> Olvera's chilling indictments become especially prophetic when juxtaposed with the events that occurred at Tlatelolco later that year.

Unlike *Mejicanos*, which was part of a countercultural literary movement, *lucha libre* films were born out of professional wrestling, a popular spectacle that sits at the threshold

between sport, theatre, and ritual (Levi xvi).<sup>8</sup> These events played a major role in urban communities, in large part because they were performed in local rings. Given the spectacle's theatrical nature, it played a conservative, cathartic role for working class Mexicans (Syder and Tierney 42; Bertaccini 88-89; del Pozo Marx 185-86). As Heather Levi notes, *lucha libre* matches "paralleled a political system in which electioneering took place behind closed doors, elections ratified decisions that were already made, and people who appeared to be opponents were really working together" (192). If anything, the relationship between this sport and the state ran even deeper than she asserts. Because the audience engaged in a back-and-forth with the fighters, many people had the sensation that they could contribute to the outcome of the fights despite the fact that the results were decided long before anyone entered the ring (Villarreal). Viewed in this light, these performances at least tacitly buoyed the regime as they allowed audiences to vent their frustrations in a politically safe environment.

Because of its popularity, *lucha libre*'s conservatism extended beyond the ring and into the political arena. During his presidential campaign, for example, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz requested that El Santo accompany him at his rallies because he knew the *luchador* would draw large crowds. The wrestler's remarkable success in engaging potential voters led Díaz Ordaz to tell an aid, "dígame que le agradezco mucho su cooperación, pero al paso que vamos, ¡él terminará siendo presidente!" (qtd. in Illescas Nájera 52). This quote alludes to the intimate relationship between politics, acting, and athletics that made El Santo into a type of lettered figure throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Certainly, the wrestler's ties to post-revolutionary ideologies were imperfect. Because no other political parties could field competitive presidential candidates, we should not necessarily conflate his political performances with personal ideology. The *luchador* often transcended political differences and served as a uniting force across a

divided nation. As he embodied justice and the Good (two values whose definition could change greatly depending on the context),<sup>9</sup> any political discourse could easily incorporate him and other masked wrestlers into its message.<sup>10</sup> In *La noche de Tlatelolco*, for example, Elena Poniatowska notes that student protesters listened to El Santo music (113). What is more, and the *luchador* was never associated with the military action of October 2<sup>nd</sup>.

That said, El Santo—and other masked *luchadores* like Blue Demon and Mil Máscaras—evoked nationalistic ideals of *mestizo* modernity in a similar way to the lettered protagonists of the decades immediately following the Revolution. Certainly, there were major differences, particularly this new cinema's greater focus on the urban rather than the rural, but when the *luchador* appeared on the silver screen, he promulgated the same cathartic, statist discourses that he produced in the ring (Bertaccini 103). In this new context his nationalistic discourse asserted modern (*mestizo*) Mexico's right to oppose external imperialism even as it tacitly endorsed internal empire and Mexican hegemony in countries like Haiti. This fact provides some interesting insight about the nature of the Mexican lettered city in the 1960s and even into the 1970s; Jean Franco has argued that during these decades, "literature became the mirror in which the antithesis to the real state was reflected" (*Decline and Fall* 14). She bases her assertion primarily on literary movements like *la onda*, which differed from its predecessors by purposefully detracting from the values of the state. By asserting film as another possible venue for the *letrado*, this chapter shows that the lettered city continued in Mexico throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s, albeit through a new medium. Far from signaling the end of the *letrado*, the shift to Mexploitation as a principal source of lettered discourse shows that the figure once again reinvented itself to adapt to social changes.

Beyond extending our knowledge of how the lettered city evolved in the 1960s and



1970s, this chapter paints a more complete picture of the political discourses, mythologies, and debates that informed state violence in these decades. The imperialistic nature of the *mestizo* state is much more obvious in both the lettered and *onda* SF of the 1960s and 1970s than it is in the works I have considered in previous chapters. This in part results from a historical referent in which internal imperialism had become more visible. Statist discourses aimed to justify internal imperialism, while countercultural texts exposed it as a serious contradiction of the nation's purported democratic values.<sup>11</sup> As they engage the imperial nature of the *mestizo* state, these works enter into direct dialogue with Octavio Paz, who asserts that Mexico's racial hybridity has left contemporary citizens as heirs to the traditions of both the conquerors and the conquered. This dual inheritance means that Mexican subjects must constantly choose between "chingar o ser chingado" (86). Paz's work provides a useful point of departure in the current discussion of colonial discourses in Mexican SF. However, the texts I analyze below move beyond Paz's assertions as they show people who are simultaneously *chingón* and *chingado* rather than one or the other. The works I view below do not merely uphold a binary of oppressor/oppressed; instead they articulate the *mestizo* subject position within a racialized political hierarchy that affords greater or lesser value to a body or society based on its ties to Europe. *Mestizo* identity affords people and nations sufficient privilege to oppress Amerindians (or aliens), but it also signals them as subordinate to "white," European nations. Whereas Santo films overcame this secondary status of the *mestizo* through an authentically Mexican superhero, *Mejicanos* suggests that the state should refuse to operate within such a construct of power in the first place.

Of course, *mestizo* imperialism did not suddenly emerge with the conclusion of the Revolution. Ever since achieving independence, mixed-race countries from Latin America have tried to assert their subjectivity and resist foreign incursions in their territory—by "imitating"

European cultures and political systems (Schwarz 1-2). According to Roberto Schwarz, one key component of this imitation emerged shortly after these countries gained independence and “the socio-economic structure created by colonial exploitation remained intact, though now for the benefit of local dominant [*mestizo/criollo*] classes” (12). Even as they created internal empires, elites in Latin American countries like Mexico could never fully shake off their own colonial status due to their servile relationship—and perceived modernity deficit—to Western countries like the US (Krauze 45-47; Santiago 1-8). This fact supports Claudio Lomnitz’s belief that one key component of Mexican “internal colonialism” was its propped “weakness in the international arena” (*Deep* 128).<sup>12</sup> The state carried out projects of internal empire in order to validate its claims to modernity, not only for itself, but for the entire international community. However, these practices were largely doomed to fail because the post-revolutionary state lacked the international prestige necessary to leverage its imperial gains for greater respect on the world stage.

This fact suggests that the *mestizo/criollo* drive for internal empire largely resulted as state officials mimicked the very powers that challenged their sovereignty. According to Homi K. Bhabha, mimicry—or imitation in Schwarz’s terms—emerges as colonizing agents produce a “reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (126, emphasis in original). As European conquerors instilled their culture in Mexico, they clearly differentiated themselves from *mestizos* even as people of mixed European descent tried to assert their own subjectivity. As such, rather than provide a means for resistance and self-expression, mimicry amplified Mexican and Latin American Otherness. This reality emphasizes the fact that systemic conditions make it impossible for the subordinate to achieve equality by mimicking the colonizer. This is in part because mimicked behavior is rarely authentic; James C.

Scott illustrates this fact through his concept of the “public transcript,” a space where “public performance of the subordinate [. . .] [is] shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful” (2). Mimetic behaviors within colonized societies conform to the oppressor’s worldview, but they also produce the fissures necessary to assert intelligible Otherness (Bhabha 128).<sup>13</sup> Adapted to the Latin American and Mexican context, Bhabha’s assertion, “to be Anglicized is [. . .] not to be English” (128), would become “to be Westernized is not to be Western.” Despite mimicking imperial powers, Latin American countries remain on the global periphery even after patterning their actions after those of other imperial powers. This in part occurs because as *mestizo* elites assert their racial superiority *vis a vis* the indigenous population, they affirm racial hierarchies that afford them less privilege than it does to people from “whiter” nations.

Latin American mimicry differs from that described by Bhabha (130-32), whose primary focus is the mimetic drive’s effect on the day-to-day life, cultural tastes, and prejudices of the subaltern. Within the Mexican and Latin American context, imitation produces an aspiring imperial power. Thus mimicry extends beyond the public transcript and into the “hidden transcript,” which is performed “beyond direct observation by powerholders” (Scott 4). One example of this within Mexico occurred as state-sponsored discourses of cultural nationalism asserted internal empire as a key component of *mexicanidad*. Recent studies of Mexico have largely viewed official *mestizaje* as a series of debates within the elite about how to assimilate the indigenous population into the modern state (Lund *Mestizo*; Palou). These paradigmatic studies provide fascinating accounts about the intellectual and artistic currents that contributed to a mindset of internal imperialism, but they tend to ignore how these *mestizo* colonizers’ own colonized experience largely constructed their own understandings of race and modernity in the country. Yet it is this complicated history that led state and lettered officials to assert that

national progress could only emerge through a project of racial domination. In the Mexican case, then, the hidden transcript ceased to be a site of resistance and instead became a space from which the subaltern could articulate their own goals of imperial grandeur. Viewed in this light, internal imperialism represented a form of resistance; *mestizo* actors believed that if they could establish internal colonies, they would eventually discourage other powers from meddling in their domestic affairs.<sup>14</sup> That said, it is hard to justify a policy of domination—especially one that would lead to events like those at Tlatelolco—on these grounds. Regardless of its dubious morality, the “hidden transcript” became a site from which *mestizo* actors could authentically mimic their imperial masters.

Given this historical referent, it should come as no surprise that mimetic imperialism, when coupled with nationalism, condemned foreign actors who tried to imperialize (*mestizo*) Mexico even as it celebrated *mestizo* attempts at empire—both internal and external. One of the most effective means through which mid-century Mexican SF and horror tapped into these imperial attitudes was the juxtaposition of *mestizo* protagonists with post and protohuman subjects. Depending on how they interface with the *mestizo* state, mid-century Mexican representations of the almost human are either monstrous and enslaving or optimistic and liberatory. Within this framework, posthumanity becomes a potential that the state and/or its enemies can use toward their own ends; in a similar vein, protohumanity represents an indigenous past that the nation must eschew. Both *Mexploitation* and *Mejicanos* stand apart from the works that I have considered thus far because they include a wider array of posthuman subjects than do the works of Vasconcelos and Emilio Fernández. Beyond the technologically hybrid, cyborg body, these later works imagine aliens, zombies, and even protohuman monsters like reanimated indigenous mummies. In each case these figures transcend the simple tropes of

science fiction and horror and instead underscore imperial threats or ambitions.

Elaine L. Graham views the vast array of posthuman entities in the popular imaginary as the most recent addition to the field of teratology, or the study of monsters and/or the monstrous. As she explains, monsters “[signal] a terrible breach in formerly inviolate categories” by denaturalizing cultural beliefs and affirming human qualities in the Other (39); “monstrosity” emerges not from a creature’s differences from the human, but from its similarities. One of the most salient examples of posthumanity represented in Mexploitation cinema and *Mejicanos* is that of extraterrestrials, the newest monsters to haunt humanity’s imagination (Graham 39). Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado observes that “aliens are one of science fiction’s most common clichés. Ever since they appeared in literature in the eighteenth century as an updated version of the myth of the noble savage, they have been used to critique and relativize social conventions” (143). It is especially fruitful to note how representations of human/extraterrestrial relations illuminate 1960s Mexico’s racial and political discourses. As quintessential foreigners, aliens become especially natural bearers of colonial discourse(s) (Rieder 1-33). In Olvera’s novel, outer space represents a new frontier for exploration and exploitation, but at no point does the author justify imperialism. Instead, he combines SF tropes with a singular narrative voice to distance his society from 1960s Mexico, thus opening official discourses of internal empire up to further scrutiny. Because Mexploitation cinema almost always views aliens as imperial aggressors, it generally produces cathartic films that buoy statist doctrines.

### **Masking the Lettered Projects of Mexploitation Cinema**

Lettered Mexploitation cinema differed greatly from that of the Golden Age (1935-1956) in large part because of its much lower quality. When viewed alongside the films of the previous

epoch—where the national film industry received a great deal of foreign and national funding for its productions (Castro-Ricalde and Irwin 53-54)—Mexploitation seemed especially lowbrow. As funds dried up, directors were left largely to fend for themselves, and the B-movie reigned. Notwithstanding this new economic model, Victoria Ruétalo and Dolores Tierney note that, unlike the US context, where exploitation cinema often challenged state ideals, Latsploitation—and by extension Mexploitation—was “often made within certain national industries” (4; 1-7). Despite its aesthetic shortcomings, then, Mexploitation cinema continued the lettered traditions of the Golden Age as it buoyed nationalistic and statist doctrines from within.<sup>15</sup> Nobody would have more success in this new, Mexican cinema than Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta. A normal man from Tulancingo, his silver mask transformed him into El Santo. Already a hero in the ring and in *fotomontajes*, or photographic comic books (Wilt 211-12), he made a smooth transition to cinema. According to Rafael Aviña, “Santo tuvo la suerte de llegar en un momento preciso, cuando el cine nacional se debatía en su peor crisis financiera y temática al término de la llamada ‘época de oro’” (“Santo” 30). This assertion accounts for Santo’s commercial success; however, it also explains why critics have largely ignored his work despite the fact that his popularity rivaled that of the greatest stars of the Golden Age.

The conditions that would lead to El Santo’s cinematic career came in 1955, when the government banned *lucha libre* fights from television. Given the sport’s generally conservative role in society, it is surprising that the PRI chose to impede its diffusion throughout the nation. Heather Levi provides some insight as to why this may have occurred as she argues that the sport posits “lo naco”—or the urbanized Amerindian who fails to fully incorporate into *mestizo* society—as the new incarnation of *lo mexicano* (196-99). Many have speculated that the ban was instated out of fear that televised contests would infect the middle and upper classes. After its

removal from television, wrestling was limited to people living in working class neighborhoods like Mexico City's Tepito. Ironically, this censorship resulted in the production of some 300 *lucha libre* films—52 of which starred El Santo. To a large extent these movies were an underhanded means of exporting *lucha libre* to people who could not attend live events (Lieberman 5; Levi 177-214).<sup>16</sup> Viewed in this light, *lucha libre* films are an example of a narrow resistance. Each movie shows at least one fight in the ring, always televised, as if imploring the government to lift its ban.<sup>17</sup> In a strategic move to placate the censors, these films adopted Hollywood-style horror and SF monsters—as well as various specters of the indigenous past—as stand-ins for the *rudos* (Syder and Tierney 43-44), or villains of the ring whom the government specifically targeted in its television ban (Levi 181-84). The films could thus celebrate the heroic *técnicos* (good guys) while at the same time avoiding actual *rudos*. Because the villains of these films hailed from foreign lands or the pre-Columbian past, Mexploitation buoyed a dominant narrative of a *mestizo* state facing existential threats both internally and externally.

In a way, then, the state turned Mexploitation directors and pro-wrestlers into lettered figures who championed the same ideals that the PRI invoked when carrying out actions of state violence. Santo's cinema generally promoted an imaginary of Mexican (*mestizo*) moral superiority that, according to Anne Rubenstein, stemmed largely from its hero's status "as an exemplary counter-macho" (577). Rather than embodying *macho* brute force, a quick temper, and a taste for alcohol, the *luchador* exerts self-control and embodies wisdom.<sup>18</sup> These traits signal him as the perfect hero to promulgate statist discourses and defend the nation from internal and external threats.<sup>19</sup> In no film do discourses of mimetic imperialism ring more clearly than in *Santo contra la invasión de los marcianos* (1966). The movie begins with ominous music

as it splices footage of several US shuttle launches that both reference the space race and the rampant nuclear testing of the Cold War. It later cuts over to more borrowed footage, this time of a spacewalk, while a background narrator states, “a medida que la ciencia del hombre avanza, surge una tremenda incógnita: ¿Será nuestro planeta el único habitado por seres racionales como nosotros? De ser así, ¿llegaremos a conquistar estos mundos, o por el contrario, sus habitantes vendrán a someternos a su dominio?” As the monologue ends, an alien spaceship—which looks like two frying pans stacked on top of each other—moves clumsily across the screen, thus foreshadowing an imminent Martian invasion.

In what Doyle Greene calls “the most overtly political of the Santo films” (70), the Martians’ decision to invade Mexico City reflects a historical context in which the capital is “a serious candidate for a Martian invasion” due to its modernity (Negrete and Orozco 189). The film codes these unwanted visitors as nonhuman through their clothing; men dress like unmasked professional wrestlers while the women don short, flashy skirts.<sup>20</sup> Aliens of both genders sport a third eye, although it is never clear if this is a cybernetic prosthetic or part of their anatomy. Greene argues that the film explicitly ties the Martians to European, Western imperialism as the Martians take on Greek names and proclaim themselves as the original inhabitants of Atlantis (68-83). The film further cements the Martians’ ties to Europe by showing them read an ultimatum that draws to mind colonial Spain’s practice of reading “El Requerimiento” before attacking Amerindian cities. The Martian leader, Argos (Wolf Rufinskis),<sup>21</sup> broadcasts a message using the *vosotros* form, admonishing the earthlings to abandon their nuclear experiments, which endanger even Mars, or face destruction.

If the broadcast has connected the Martians with the Spaniards, the demand that the earthlings follow enlightened Martian ideals or face extermination equates them with the 1960s



US—a country that hypocritically appealed to democratic and humanitarian ideals that many Mexicans felt it contradicted in Vietnam (Poniatowska 19; 217). Similar to Mexico’s northern neighbor, the Martians are willing to kill innocent children in defense of their supposed values. One early scene shows Hercules, a Martian scout, teleport to a playground in Mexico City, where he starts vaporizing innocent men, women, and children with invisible rays from his third eye. Luckily, Santo is offering a clinic to young children at this same site. He confronts the alien attacker and, after an impressive show of *lucha libre*, chases him away. After Hercules teleports back to his base, the aliens decide that they must capture El Santo alive because he is the perfect physical specimen. The pro wrestler, a respected scientist, and a Catholic priest represent the crown jewels of a Martian eugenic project in which the invaders will identify the “best” humans and return them to Mars where they will continue to propagate the species after the destruction of Earth. Greene asserts that the priest and the professor show science and religion as two complimentary pillars of Mexican society (72); however, we should not forget that Santo is a third pillar. The wrestler’s very body symbolizes modern, *mestizo* masculinity, which entails “justice, decency, and mexicanidad” (Greene 70). Santo’s physique is one of his greatest assets and liabilities across his cinema, especially when imperial subjects use science to subjugate Mexico.

Throughout his work, El Santo would stand against numerous different enemies, and the storylines across his films were at times contradictory; nevertheless, his presence and lettered ideals remained constant. David Wilt asserts that “the only consistent facet of the movies was Santo himself” (218). At the same time, Mora argues that “[Santo’s] films reinforced each other over the years, amounting to a single Mexican-style fairytale of good versus evil played out on the wrestling mat” (148). These apparently contradictory observations explain how, despite

frequent narrative inconsistencies between films, Santo established his mythos across the totality of his work (Fernández Reyes 15; 156-74; Illescas Nájera 53-62). They also assist us in understanding what aspects we should include in our cross-film analyses and which ones we should not. Any time that discursive significance is assigned to the wrestler's body, we should consider how that furthers Santo's identity as a larger than life superhero. Generally, Santo's antagonists attempt to subjugate his body in search of personal gain. Along with the Martians, the Frankenstein family is especially infatuated with his specimen. In *Santo contra la hija de Frankenstein* (1971) and *Santo y Blue Demon contra el doctor Frankenstein* (1973) we see antagonists whose family name, as well as their penchant for unethical science experiments, signals them as Others despite their highly Mexicanized Spanish.

In the first of the aforementioned films, Frida Frankenstein (Gina Romand), the century-old daughter of the famous villain of Hollywood horror, learns that the effects of her age disappear when she injects herself with Santo's blood.<sup>22</sup> This is due to a mutation that has caused abnormally high levels of the "TR factor," which causes the body to recover from injuries and aging. Her supply of the needed fluid—which she acquired from a nosebleed at one of his matches—has begun to dwindle, so she orchestrates a plan to kidnap the *luchador's* girlfriend and draw him into her lair. Although she posits a biological reason for Santo's eternal youth, the story responds to a perceived ageless quality that many people have asserted to Santo's profession as a masked wrestler (Monsiváis *Rituales*). Interestingly, Frida herself reveals that she started to suspect Santo's condition after noticing that after thirty years of professional wrestling, he showed no signs of physical wear. When this movie was produced, Santo was almost sixty years old; nevertheless, his mask concealed his true age. Even after Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta's death, El Santo continued on through his son, who still wears the mask in his fights. Throughout

Santo's career, the slippage between the mask and the body produced interesting narratives—such as a mutation that leads to his eternal youth—that linked him to posthuman identity.

The *luchador's* biological advantages also tie him to the discourses of official, Vasconcelian *mestizaje* that were so prevalent at least until the events at Tlatelolco. When José Vasconcelos decreed the inevitable aesthetic triumph of *mestizaje*, he did so with the assumption that such eugenics would produce a type of humanity heretofore unknown to the world. The genetic changes that the human race would undergo would lead to Mexican—and world—redemption. In a way, then, Vasconcelos's cosmic race is a mutant people in that it harbors genetic combinations that were previously unknown. What separates Vasconcelos's utopia from the rest of humanity is the way in which it fetishizes and consciously aims to improve human genetics. As the philosopher states, “se ha producido y se sigue consumando la mezcla de sangres. Y es en esta fusión de estirpes donde debemos buscar el rastro fundamental de la idiosincrasia iberoamericana” (16). Most studies on official *mestizaje* focus mainly on the state's *indigenista* movements, but we should bear in mind that Europeans were also going to benefit from breeding with the descendants of Mexico's pre-Columbian past as their progeny joined the fifth race.<sup>23</sup>

The film emphasizes the redemptive value of *mestizaje* on the European body through an especially literal incarnation of Vasconcelos's notion of the mixing of blood, where the European, Frida Frankenstein, forcibly extracts the fluid from her prisoner. As she injects herself with the fluid, her body takes on—at least fleetingly—the same mutations as those of the iconic wrestler. This film also transgresses certain aspects of Vasconcelian thought, where the European subject was necessarily male and the indigenous object female. Frankenstein's daughter attempts to exploit the Mexican mutant in a scene that harks back to the historical European oppression of

the inhabitants of America. Here Santo is captured, bound, and locked away in a room. The woman enters, faces him, and strips him of his mask in an act of figurative castration.<sup>24</sup> The camera pans to the side so that we can only see the hair on the back of his head—the actor is a double. While this scene plays out the racial undertones of the conquest, it is telling that it once again inverts the gender roles; in the language of Paz’s vulgar dichotomy, the female is now the active *chingona*, and the man is the passive *chingado*. Frida extends this imagery as she forcefully kisses her captive. Her exploitation of Santo’s body does not end here; she later commissions the wrestler’s hypnotized girlfriend to pluck out her lover’s eyes. Her plans to keep Santo alive do not reflect altruistic goodness, but an imperial need to harvest his body. Unfortunately for Frankenstein’s daughter, true love proves stronger than hypnosis; in an off-camera confrontation, the girlfriend remembers her love for the *luchador*, unties him, and returns his mask.

The assertion that this film—and others—communicates lettered, pro-*mestizo* discourse requires the understanding of this superhero as explicitly coded as *mestizo*. Given the slippage between European, *mestizo*, and indigenous within the Mexican context, simple observations of phenotype will not suffice. Instead, we must show how the wrestler is associated with *mestizaje*, and thus modernity, while at the same time recognizing his ties to pre-Colombian indigeneity. Nothing illustrates Santo’s equation with indigenous Mexico more convincingly than his mask. Levi argues that the popularity of masks in Mexican *lucha libre* lies in their evocation of pre-Columbian performances, both ritual and theatrical (106-09). Interestingly, the first professional wrestlers to wear masks came from the US that only afterwards were they adopted in Mexico. However, while American wrestlers would soon turn to face paint and other markings of the body, masks have remained an integral part of *lucha libre*. Levi explains this phenomenon as the

result of a cultural resonance with urbanized, Amerindian spectators.

The mask becomes the focal point for one of the great divergences between Mexican *lucha libre* and professional wrestling in other contexts. When Roland Barthes dedicated one of the chapters of his *Mythologies* to this sport, he did so focusing on the French version. As he argues, “the virtue of all-in wrestling is that it is the spectacle of excess. Here we find a grandiloquence which must have been that of ancient theatres” (15). For Barthes, one of the great draws of professional wrestling is its unapologetic violence. This holds especially true when a person suffers because “he exhibits for all to see his face, exaggeratedly contorted by an intolerable affliction” (19). Such observations fail to capture the essence of Mexican *lucha libre*, where the numerous masked fighters cannot make facial expressions.<sup>25</sup> What is more, the celebration of pain on the part of the *luchador* would undermine the masculinity of masked wrestlers in a nation where, according to Paz, “el ideal de la ‘hombria’ consiste en no ‘rajarse’ nunca” (32-33). Beyond invoking the pre-Columbian past, Santo’s mask also alludes to the constructs of masculinity asserted by Paz because it allows him to suffer without losing his (counter)*macho* image (Lieberman 13).

Perhaps no film exaggerates the myth of Santo’s mask more than *El hacha diabólica* (1964). In this film a professor looks at the wrestler’s mask—which Santo’s family has handed down from generation to generation—under a magnifying glass and finds the inscription, “ABRACADABRA.” He informs Santo that this inscription comes from a man who practiced “la ciencia del bien.” We should note that the Spanish *ciencia* has slightly different connotations from the English science, particularly in early modern societies such as that of Santo’s progenitors. In this context the word probably means knowledge, or even magic. In any case, it is significant that the film attributes great supernatural properties to Santo’s mask.<sup>26</sup> During this

same conversation, Santo admits that, when he feels unable to continue his fights, his mask gives him strength. The hero's admission shows us that the mask, and the rest of his costume—which is apparently made of an “indestructible material”—are more than simple clothing; they are living, prosthetic extensions of his body that assist him in defending the Good. The fusion of the wrestler and his mask produces a technologically hybrid protagonist that fits neatly in a tradition of superheroes whose power is rooted in a cyborg condition (Oelhart 219-32).

Santo's cyborg status is not limited to a symbiotic relationship with his wrestling costume; rather it extends to his place within modernity.<sup>27</sup> J. Andrew Brown asserts that “posthumans can have artificial implants [such as prosthetic masks] but they can also have an identity based on the relationship between them and their machines” (11). Here Brown is referring specifically to the internet, but the *luchador* uses radio and video technology in a way that foresees the interconnectedness of the World Wide Web. Lieberman sees Santo's technological competence—signaled through “inexplicable devices and banks of blinking lights that signified the high technology of the day” (Lieberman 10)—as the discursive proof of the wrestler's place within modern, and hence *mestizo*, society. According to Lieberman, these movies show that “the world is technological, and it might be used for good or evil, but it will be used and there is no retreat back to a pre-technological age” (11). In *Santo contra los zombies* (1962) the wrestler uses his lab to detect, and thwart, zombie movements such as an attack on an orphanage. The wrestler's ability to detect far away events in his impressive laboratory associates him with cyborg identities through his relationship with technology. His ties to indigeneity are especially clear through his mask, while his knowledge of science codes him as a full participant in a “*mestizo* state” that fetishizes modernity. Unlike Haraway's ambiguous cyborg that deconstructs notions of gender and race (161-65), El Santo ultimately accentuates

these constructs by articulating a hyper *mestizo* masculinity. Even so, he remains liberatory within the discursive framework of official *mestizaje* because his exemplary performance of both race and gender allows him to contain other monstrous threats to the nation.

His strength also makes him an especially attractive target for Frida's family member, Doctor Irving Frankenstein (Jorge Russek), who himself poses an external threat to Mexico.<sup>28</sup> In *Santo y Blue Demon contra el doctor Frankenstein*, the 100-year-old grandson of the famous scientist has recovered his grandfather's technology for controlling dead bodies. Hoping to capture Santo and enslave his body, he sets up an elaborate trap that results in the wrestler being subdued on an operating table. Unfortunately for Frankenstein's heir, Blue Demon enters right before the medics euthanize El Santo and insert electronic gadgets into his body. Both *luchadores* escape, and shortly thereafter, in a match between El Santo and one of Frankenstein's disguised cadavers, Mexico's dynamic duo confronts and kills both the scientist and his creation.

Frankenstein's practice of killing people and controlling their bodies through technology constitutes the especially uncanny colonialization of Mexican bodies through a posthuman entity that is difficult to categorize as either cyborg or zombie because it shares similarities with both. Part of this results from the time in which these movies were produced; the cyborg only began to enter explicitly into the human imagination in the 1960s, when it became apparent that only a body coupled with technology could survive the rigors of space travel (Clynes and Kline 29-31). It would take another two decades for Haraway to begin theorizing about the idea, and longer still for popular and intellectual cultures to further develop the concept. Likewise, the figure of the zombie has undergone numerous transformations from its original articulation, but imperialism has always sat at the entity's core (McAllister 476-77; Dendle 46-48). What began as the perfect servant from the imagination of black Haitian slaves has more recently morphed

into “an embarrassingly literal incarnation of the drive to cannibalize and consume that seems to reflect, perhaps a little too neatly, our own late capitalist moment” (Laraway 133). As David Laraway notes, this recent version of the zombie entered public discourse after films like *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and especially the 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead*, which came out near the end of Santo’s cinematic career. The zombies of the Santo films are difficult to categorize from a twenty-first century perspective in that they are undead, cybernetic cadavers.

In *Santo contra los zombies* we see a paradigmatic version of this Mexploitation entity that deconstructs any clear notion of zombie and cyborg. Here an evil, masked scientist has kidnapped Professor Sandoval, a man who has done a great deal of work on zombies. We later learn that the villain has converted the professor into one of his legions of undead minions. Interestingly, the professor continues to employ the knowledge he gained before dying by helping the masked scientist to convert dead bodies into new slaves. If one of the defining traits of modern zombies is a lack of cognitive abilities (Laraway 135; Juliet and Embry 92-96), then it becomes clear that these undead, whose expertise facilitates complex surgeries, are somehow different. Because they differ from other incarnations of the zombie, these Mexploitation versions lend greater credence to Sarah Lauro Juliet and Karen Embry’s assertion that “unlike Donna Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Manifesto,’ we do not propose that the position of the zombie is a liberating one—indeed, in its history, and in its metaphors, the zombie is most often a slave” (87). If the modern zombie is compelled to consume for consumption’s sake (Loudermilk 84-89), the zombies of Santo’s cinema are bound to obey the oppressor for the oppressor’s sake. This is especially clear in *Santo contra la magia negra*, where a white witch, played by the future Mexican first lady, Sasha Montenegro, conjures black zombies against the wrestler to sabotage his mission with Interpol. Here the power dynamic between zombie and master reflects



imperial and racial privilege. The zombies of *Santo contra la magia negra* are subjected to an Orientalized representation of voodoo. In *Santo contra los zombies*, Professor Sandoval has found a way to scientifically reproduce identical behavior in corpses, but his zombies have to wear a special belt that is connected by radio to their master.<sup>29</sup>

The film highlights the cybernetic aspect of these monsters at its climax when Gloria Sandoval (Lorena Velázquez), the professor's daughter, is taken to the masked scientist's lair. In several impressive shots, the mad scientist promises her that she will see her father. Standing behind the woman, the villain activates certain switches on his belt, which bring her father's undead body to the front of the room, where he waves at her before turning away. Only afterwards does Gloria realize that she has seen a zombie; however, in a disturbing sense, this zombie is still her father. As we have already seen, Professor Sandoval exhibits upper brain functions even if he lacks agency. This point makes the aforementioned scene especially horrific. The father is forced to witness his daughter's impending doom; he can comprehend her plight, yet he can do nothing to prevent it because his brain no longer controls his body. The fusion of the professor's corpse with technology has turned him into a perfect slave who is literally incapable of opposing his master's will.

The posthuman monsters in this film toe the line between the zombie and cyborg from a technological standpoint, yet they enjoy no liberatory potential. Far from providing an escape by producing Haraway's "pleasurably tight coupling[s]" between the organic and the inorganic (152), the fusion of the body with technology becomes the key to creating and enslaving bodies. This trope appears time and again in Santo's films, and in most cases it is a European scientist who enslaves "decent" Mexicans.<sup>30</sup> In *Santo contra los zombies* the villain turns out not to be a foreign criminal, but Professor Sandoval's brother. When Gloria asks Santo why her uncle would

murder his own brother, the hero replies, “por ambición, por riquezas y por poder. Cuando los hombres desafían las leyes de Dios, caen víctimas de sus propias maldades.”<sup>31</sup> Because the evil Sandoval steals agency from those people that he oppresses, he becomes a clear example of a colonizer of modern, *mestizo* Mexicans that must be defeated.

In most cases, the internal threats to the Mexican state are juxtaposed with the country’s colonial and pre-Columbian history. One of the ways in which Mexploitation most clearly evoked the lettered cinema of the Golden Age was through narratives that not only justified but decreed *mestizo* Mexico’s right—and even duty—to domesticize the Amerindian. With titles like *Santo contra la venganza de La Llorona* (1974) and *La venganza de la momia* (1970), it comes as no surprise that Lieberman and others have asserted Santo’s role in rescuing Mexico from its own past. Alfonso Morales notes the multiplicity of Santo’s villains when he writes that “whether they derive from myth or legend, whether they are the spawn of Hell or technology, all embodiments of Evil are the same when slammed to the floor” (183). This quote captures the essence of Santo’s films and problematically posits Mexico’s indigenous past as an evil that must be overcome. Both of the aforementioned movies are particularly interesting because El Santo does not confront these specters of the past directly. Carlos Monsiváis claims that Santo’s titles condense his films’ storylines into a few words (*Rituales*), but we run the risk of misinterpretation if we fail to look beyond the cover. These two films may advertise a monster in the title, but their true villains are corrupt, modern-day Mexican men who are willing to kill for treasures from the nation’s painful history. Santo defuses the threat of La Llorona by securing a treasure that a crime boss has stolen. When he donates it to a children’s hospital, he frees Mexico’s most famous ghost from her pact with the devil, thus liberating Mexico from a specter that has long haunted it. Because he never sees her, the *luchador* remains unconvinced that La

Llorona ever existed as the film ends.

La Llorona represents a distinct form of monstrosity from the posthuman beings we have dealt with up to this point, but she poses equally serious questions about *mexicanidad*. María Herrera-Sobek notes that the figure comes from at least two interweaving sources. In one incarnation of the myth she is a *mestiza* whose Spanish lover betrayed her for a European woman. In another she is an indigenous prophetess who foretells the destruction of Tenochtitlán prior to the arrival of Cortés (106-08). There are probably many other accounts that inform the legend of La Llorona as well; however, a common theme that runs across most of them is her tie to indigeneity. Within a colonial paradigm, both the Aztec prophetess and the *mestiza* lover would have been coded as indigenous, so the combination of their race and gender would have led to their relegation to the periphery (Steven Stern 16). The film largely sidesteps any ties between La Llorona and indigeneity, instead imagining the ghostly figure through class distinction. Regardless of the shortcomings of the film, the figure of La Llorona embodies a type of “protohumanity” because she dates back to the earliest days of the Conquest, a time that is prehistoric in the sense that no indigenous records exist regarding this time period. One especially understudied aspect of these films is how they almost systematically nullify internally subaltern societies and cosmologies by dismissing the validity of indigenous ways of knowing.

Santo’s great accomplishment in *La venganza de la momia* is that he disproves a young indigenous boy’s “superstitious” beliefs. In this movie, Santo accompanies a group of *mestizo* intellectuals who enter the ancient tomb of an indigenous mummy. Upon discovering this relic of the past, they celebrate their great “scientific” advancement. The group’s indigenous guide takes exception to such hubris as he quips, “¿el avance de quién? ¿De los blancos?” The Westernized team may not know much about this mummified corpse, but the surrounding community knows

that if the mummy is disturbed, he will reawaken. Perhaps a little too conveniently, the guide himself will be the monster's first target because it was his ancestor who condemned this mummy to death. This sets the tone for a fairly formulaic Mexploitation horror film; however, the movie shocks its audience's generic expectations when the villain ends up being Sergio Morales (Eric del Castillo), a member of the expedition who dresses up as a mummy and starts killing the crew so that he can have the mummy's treasure for himself. The threat, then, comes not from the past per se, but from how modern subjects appropriate it for their own exploitative ends. The mummy's (in)existence effectively strips the indigenous characters of their own history; as their knowledge proves inadequate and demonstrably false, official *mestizo* histories are validated.

The result is an Orientalization of the Olpache civilization—both past and present—in the tradition of Edward Said, where colonizing subjects essentialize the Other (31-49). The ancient civilization fits within Dale J. Pratt's definition of the protohuman as a prehistoric, incommensurable—and in this case exotic—Other (17). What is more, the Olpaches' living descendants are, at best, individuals whose folkloric knowledge may help parse together what constitutes “real” history, and at worst simply get in the way of scientific research. This becomes especially clear when the lead archaeologist finds a manuscript near the mummy's tomb and orders his guide to interpret it.<sup>32</sup> The guide refuses at first because he does not wish to offend the dead, but he reluctantly agrees when the archaeologist says that he will find someone else if the guide refuses. This back-and-forth presents modern-day Amerindians as obstacles to *mestizo* attempts to unlock the mysteries of pre-Columbian societies and greatness. The story that the guide recounts greatly resembles Hollywood's *Mummy* films, where a man is condemned to death and mummified alive because of a forbidden love.

This hardly innovative storyline becomes surprisingly interesting as we consider how it is represented filmically. The guide, who simultaneously reads the indigenous script and interprets it into Spanish, speaks with a monotonous, rhythmic cadence while the camera films actors from the past who represent his words. Everything is shown in a folkloric manner; the scenes employ wind music and simple percussion that, when coupled with the guide's narration, produce an essentialized past that conflates Mexican indigeneity into a single, monolithic entity. The Olpache are a fictitious nation whose name connects them to the Apaches, a people that lived on the nation's northern border. Yet the film's setting in the jungle equates them geographically with both the Mayans and Olmecas. The actors play out the guide's words in Teotihuacán, thus tying the Olpache to the Aztecs through architecture. Perhaps noting that Mexico State and the coastal areas of the Yucatan Peninsula enjoy vastly different flora and fauna, the cinematographer employs high-angle longshots that place the pyramids in the center of the screen and minimize the background. This cinematography seems especially amateur when juxtaposed with the Golden Age techniques of such masters as Gabriel Figueroa, whose longshots employed low-angle, curvilinear perspective, big skies, and deep focus to oppose Hollywood's influence, thus conveying an autochthonous *mexicanidad* (Ramírez-Berg 15-17). The cinematography in this film uses much more standardized Hollywoodesque techniques than its Golden Age forbears; if there is a distinction between US film tradition and what is shown in *La venganza de la momia*, it is mainly due to the latter's lower quality.

It would be unfair to compare almost any cinematographer in the world to Figueroa, one of the most successful cinematographers of his time (Lieberman and Hegarty 33), based on aesthetics alone; instead we should consider the discursive implications of these competing cinematographic techniques. Golden Age *indigenismo* communicated a discourse of official

*mestizaje* that aimed to modernize contemporary Amerindians while reifying the pre-Columbian past. Such films suggested that Mexico's Amerindians could reclaim their lost greatness if they assimilated to the state. Figueroa's shots conveyed the greatness of both modern (*mestizo*) Mexico and its Pre-Columbian past. Such is not the case in *La venganza de la momia*. Similar to the Golden Age, the latter film asserts a clear distinction between pre-Columbian and contemporary indigeneity. However, in this case both representations of the indigenous are problematic; contemporary Amerindians are childish and superstitious, while "prehistoric" Olpaches are both murderous and—as evidenced by the figure of the mummy—monstrous. Unlike the official *mestizaje* of the 1930s and 1940s, then, this film proposes a rupture between the indigenous past and present through urbanization that is more in line with Levi's notion of *lo naco*. The goal is not to emulate the greatness of past civilizations, but to overcome indigenous tendencies, both historical and contemporary, through modernization. Viewed in this light, it would be unnecessary, and perhaps even counterproductive, to depict the Olpache civilization using low-angle longshots that would romanticize pre-Columbian civilizations. The mummy may not pose a physical threat in this film, but its very memory threatens the nation.<sup>33</sup> Despite the mounting evidence in favor of a resurrected mummy wreaking havoc, at no point is Santo truly convinced that the murders are supernatural.

After confronting the "mummy" and ultimately killing him with his own spear, Santo unmasks his foe. He looks at a young indigenous boy and says "los muertos no resucitan. Es la maldad de los vivos la que siempre hace daño a sus semejantes." This comment feels especially unnatural coming from a superhero with firsthand experience facing Martians, zombies, and *mujeres vampiro*.<sup>34</sup> The *luchador*'s words come across as something similar to a parent who shows his terrified child that there is no monster under the bed, but they also demonstrate his

colonialist mentality. Here the wrestler becomes a parental figure who must lead Amerindian children—both literal and figurative—to consciousness in a way that draws to mind Joanne Herschfield’s own discussion of the previous Golden Age cinema (“Screening” 268-69). After escaping from the mummy, Santo takes the boy to one of his wrestling matches in Mexico City, and, after winning, invites him onto the ring. If Levi is correct in asserting that *lucha libre* became “naco” as it represented the indigenous transgression of urban space, then we should recognize that “naco” identity emerged as Amerindian subjects left their rural communities. The boy, in occupying this space, has effectively left his roots behind and assimilated to the urban, *mestizo* state. The lettered hero’s victory is complete; he has overcome the specters of the past, slain an overly ambitious villain, and initiated a young indigenous boy into *mestizo* modernity. When juxtaposed with his other films, *La venganza de la momia* makes a clear contribution to our understanding of the colonial projects that Mexploitation cinema imagined. Threats to Mexico could emerge from indigeneity—both past and present—or they could result from imperial forces that challenged Mexico from beyond its borders. At least within Mexploitation, *mestizo* superheroes like El Santo would play a key role in saving their nation from both sources.

### **De-Lettering the Institutionalized Revolution in *Mejicanos en el espacio***

Unlike Mexploitation, which promulgated official, state-sanctioned discourses, *Mejicanos en el espacio* challenges and undermines lettered ideals.<sup>35</sup> The novel satirically engages 22<sup>nd</sup> century “Centromexican” politics, ideologies, and institutions in order to ridicule the corruption of the late 1960s. This results in what José Manuel García-García terms “literatura gelasto-política” that targets official intellectuals, soldiers, and politicians (18-20). One early example of Olvera’s critique of official discourses comes through his protagonist’s favorite

*radionovela*, “El ermitaño en el espacio,” which tells of a Mexican space-drifter who has inherited superhuman strength from his “antepasados de bronce” (39). García-García views this seemingly innocent radio show as “una burla a la propaganda oficial del gobierno de los años sesenta, preocupados por rescatar a su manera los discursos nacionalistas de Vasconcelos” (69). The novel, then, not only satirizes official ideologies, but it is explicitly anti-*letrado* as it challenges the most sacred tenets to post-revolutionary lettered expressions of *mexicanidad*. The author critiques official discourses through his protagonist Raúl Nope, who has left a position as a university instructor after growing tired of the Party’s chafing control of the education system.<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the military career he ends up pursuing provides little relief from ridiculous government propaganda. Olvera’s novel, then, is a countercultural text that—rather than build the state from the inside like its lettered rivals—criticizes society from beyond the political center. My reading of the novel shows that as Centroméjico—and by extension 1960s Mexico—engages in imperial activities in outer space, it ironically validates the very systems of power that produce asymmetrical relations of power with the US.

Olvera is one of many mid-century writers whose work fits nicely within the theorizations of the French mystic Simone Weil, who rather bluntly states, “The notion of oppression is, in short, a stupidity. [. . .] And the notion of an oppressive class is even more stupid. We can only speak of an oppressive structure of society” (156). For Weil, then, oppression results from systemic, rather than personal, failures; indeed, the system often turns otherwise good people into oppressors. One especially interesting argument that she makes is that subordinate people gain a false feeling of control as they exert power over others (156-58). The mystic’s writings were especially influential in how Rosario Castellanos used literature to approach the social hierarchies of race and gender that abounded both in rural Chiapas and



throughout Mexico (O’Connell 238-39; Dalton, “Educating” 157-58).<sup>37</sup> Olvera’s connection to Weil is probably more roundabout than that of Castellanos, but the French mystic’s theories still elucidate the power relations to which he alludes throughout his novel. This is particularly the case regarding Centroméjico, a country that believes it has greater power when it oppresses weaker cultures. Yet Centromexican colonization occurs within a structure of power that has already designated the nation as racially and culturally mediocre; the country can certainly colonize alien civilizations within the established hierarchy, but it can never rival the US.

The novel emphasizes how Centromexican imperial endeavors do little to improve the country’s position in international politics as Nope’s squadron is ordered to investigate unclaimed territory on Ganymede, one of Jupiter’s many moons. The *espaciero* narrates the events thusly:

Bueno, pues la astronave descendió suavemente en un vallecito, haciendo alarde de los conocimientos de sus constructores. Desde la Tierra seguían paso a paso las etapas del aterrizaje en espera de que encontráramos algo que valiera la pena. Pero no encontramos nada. Absolutamente nada. De cualquier modo no lo esperábamos, así que no hubo desilusión por parte de nadie ni hubo quien se sintiera defraudado. (9)

We soon learn that this is because Centromexican astronauts only investigate worthless territories that the more powerful “güeros”—a term that Nope uses loosely to denote US, European, and even Chinese citizens—have already explored and decided not to annex. The imperial powers’ control of Centromexican expeditions is so all-encompassing that the explorers are not even allowed to retrieve lunar rocks. This last restriction proves problematic for Nope, who schemes to forge the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe on a Ganymedian stone in order

to install a basilica and cash a major profit.<sup>38</sup> Centromexican activities in space underscore how the country both feels greater power as it exploits other lands and how this behavior of necessity requires that it acquiesce to the desires of other, more powerful nations.

García-García asserts that these military maneuvers constitute nothing more than propaganda (86). He is correct in as far as the state certainly uses its expeditions to defend unjustifiable claims of Centromexican technological sophistication and military might. That said, the state also attempts to leverage its imperial gains for greater prestige back on earth. The critic's assertion probably results from his observation that the Party will never truly assert Centromexican modernity through these initiatives. But because Party leaders sincerely believe that their mimetic imperialism will bear fruit, their actions go beyond mere propaganda. The Party's steadfast imitation of US and European imperialism anchors this futuristic society clearly in 1968, and the zeal with which Centroméjico executes its space program mirrors the excitement leading up to the Olympic Games (Paz 248-53). Rather than viewing themselves as the first "Third World" country to receive this honor, national leaders saw the games as an initiation into modern society (Zolov 119-20). Thus it is no surprise that Díaz Ordaz, who "was obsessive about order and discipline" (Preston and Dillon 64), intervened so harshly against the demonstrators. The similarities between *Mejicanos* and 1960s society leads scholars like Hernán Manuel García and Luis Miguel Vargas to assert that the novel uses the trope of futurity to make countercultural commentaries on contemporary (1960s) society (García 38; Vargas 31). If López Castro is correct that the novel was forgotten after the massacre, then it is in part because of the academy's general failure to see how the text interfaces with and challenges the attitudes in the PRI that allowed that event to occur.

Similar to the case of the 1960s, Centromexican attempts to assert themselves in

international politics largely fail. The nation imagines itself embroiled in a colonial conflict, but its adversaries never view Centroméjico as an equal. The novel comically emphasizes international contempt for the nascent empire when it reveals that the US has placed a top secret base on Ganymede right next to Centromexican holdings. Rather than take extreme security measures, the North Americans depend on their southern neighbor's incompetence to hide their actions. In response to this humiliation, the Party assigns Nope to lead "Operación Gunsmoke," a spy expedition to the US base. Perhaps as proof of national leaders' inexperience regarding international relations—where opposing powers hide any intelligence they have acquired—their scheme goes no further than simply publishing the results of Nope's discovery. Clearly, Centroméjico does not seek empire for strategic purposes; instead, similar to Hegel's slave, it seeks subjectivity through a mechanical reproduction of the oppressor's model.

Far from working on behalf of national security, Nope must beat the Americans at their own game and showcase Centromexican modernity. One key component to "Operación Gunsmoke" is the presence of Lobelto, a Martian mercenary who has spent time in the South American *guerrillas* and in the Martian manifestations in Los Angeles—events that parallel the 1960s Civil Rights Movement in the US.<sup>39</sup> Lobelto and Nope plan to infiltrate the US base on Ganymede and publish their findings. Nope will lead, and Lobelto will serve as the liaison between Centroméjico and the Martians on the US base. Despite this Martian's key role in the Centromexican strategy, Nope constantly insults him. The *espaciero's* behavior is telling when juxtaposed with Centroméjico's own submissive role in the solar system's social hierarchy. Although the Centromexicans express outrage at a structure of power that systematically relegates them to the periphery, they are more than happy to use that same structure to their advantage when they can exercise dominion over the Martians. Thus Centroméjico tacitly

supports the system that makes it institutionally impossible for it to surpass the US.

In a series of events that emphasizes how Centroméjico's attempts at empire never subvert—and, indeed, generally affirm—US hegemony, Nope and Lobelto embark on their mission. As soon as they cross into the US territory, an alarm sounds, and when Nope attempts to escape, a soldier shouts “Stop, Mexican! Stop or I’ll shoot!” (75). It is surprising that US forces immediately know the nationality of their invaders. Dressed in their space suits, both Nope and Lobelto are quintessential cyborgs whose bodies are hidden and ostensibly unidentifiable. It is unlikely that they have entered with any obvious markings that would associate them with Centroméjico. Instead, this seems to be one of many cases that, according to García-García, shows Centroméjico's technological—and hence modernity—deficit to the highly efficient Americans (61). In response to Donna Haraway, who views the cyborg as a figure that destabilizes entrenched power structures, Olvera's text shows how varying ranges of unequal access to technology can neutralize the liberatory potential of cyborg identity. At the end of the ill-fated operation, the US officials return Nope and Lobelto to the Centromexican base without so much as acknowledging his commanding officer. The fact that the Americans leave Nope and Lobelto without consulting him especially angers the captain, who sees such behavior as contempt for Centroméjico.

As a true bureaucrat, the captain's aim is not to achieve a specific end, but to stay true to a process; his entrenched view of decorum is symptomatic of Centroméjico's underdevelopment. The captain's outrage is especially comical given that the US decision shields him and his country from the serious consequences of espionage. Of course, while he has avoided an international scandal, the captain still must answer to angry Party leaders, so both he and Nope remain in danger. In a fit of desperation, Nope invents a story in which he captured Lobelto from

the US base. This account exonerates both Nope and the captain, but it also means that Party officials will subject the Martian to torture and certain death. Realizing he has acted immorally, the novel's protagonist repents of his lie and attempts to sneak off the base with his Martian friend. Unfortunately, Party officials capture him and send him to an insane asylum.

In his essay "Madness and Society," Foucault argues that insanity is a construct of the state that marks and removes undesirable actors from the social discourse. As such, we should investigate what enables the state to interpellate the *espaciero* as insane. García-García deftly explains the trigger for Nope's condition when he likens him to a 22<sup>nd</sup> century Don Quijote who has listened to too many *radionovelas* (65); however, the critic largely ignores the deeper discursive ramifications of Nope's mental status. According to Foucault, the insane asylum emerged during early industrialism as a confining space that held those who could not contribute to capitalist society ("Madness" 372). Nope's failure to execute "Operación Gunsmoke" clearly marks him as incompetent, but given that none of the novel's characters are particularly good at their jobs, this explanation for his incarceration is unsatisfying; instead we must note that the protagonist poses an existential threat to Party politics. Nope's narrative voice refuses to conform to any aesthetic, political, or lettered standard; as such, his playful vocabulary and biting criticism signal him as politically dangerous. He is Foucault's "individual who reveals the truth with spirit" ("Madness" 374), and the Party signals that Centromexicans should ignore him by denoting him as insane. Yet it is this status that also suggests that the protagonist bears "the truth that ordinary men [can]not state" ("Madness" 373). The irony with which Nope characterizes Centroméjico's immoral foreign policy—and with which his own voice contradicts his prejudices—resists the intolerance that the Party has inculcated in its population. Perhaps more subversively still, Nope's words ultimately view mimetic imperialism as a self-defeating process

that must fail by its very definition. The state cannot permit Nope to speak uninhibited, so it attempts to “cure” him. Returning to Foucault, this action effectively becomes an act of forced assimilation in which Nope must remain in a treatment center until he can properly function in society (“Madness” 376-77). In other words, the state will keep him removed from public discourse until he has internalized the official ideology.

The most subversive truth that Nope communicates is that of Martian equality to the earthlings. Throughout the novel, he emphasizes numerous traits that these extraterrestrials share with Mexico’s own indigenous populations—both pre-Columbian and twentieth century. In each case, the hegemonic race (Spaniards, *criollos*, *mestizos*, Centromexicans) views the subservient race(s) as subhuman despite empirical evidence to the contrary (Quijano 532-33). Here, the Centromexicans assume their superiority and project their essentialist understanding onto the complex and varied—albeit unfamiliar—Martian humanity. In one of many telling sequences, Nope condemns US experiments that have used the Martians for lab rats even as he pejoratively refers to these aliens as “nativos” (59). Ironically, his language dehumanizes the Martians on the one hand, yet on the other hand it recognizes certain traces of humanity that other organisms native to Mars—such as the flora and fauna—lack.

Nope’s discursive strategy establishes an interplanetary and interethnic union and calls into question the denial of certain rights to the “native.” Both Centroméjico and the US brutalize their Martian subordinates. The differences in how these two countries handle their colonized subjects reinforce the popular imaginary of the conquest and virtual extermination of Amerindians in the United States and the racial and cultural *mestizaje* that would occur in Mexico.<sup>40</sup> The US does not exterminate the indigenous Martians per se, but it does use them to carry out inhumane scientific experiments. Speaking of how US experts understood the Martians

upon arriving on the planet, Nope narrates:

[Se] pensó que se trataba de animales, de simios, de changos de alguna especie no conocida en la Tierra. Como son tan parecidos a nosotros siempre era medio feo eso de verlos dando brincos por todas partes y gruñendo y pataleando cada vez que trataban de acercárseles. Andaban completamente encuerados, hembras y machos, y parecía que nunca tenían frío, a pesar de lo extremo del clima marciano. (59)

If we return to Graham's theorizations, we can see that the monstrous aspect of the Martians is not their animal-like characteristics, but their similarities to earth-based humanity. Despite lacking both language and culture when the first earthlings arrive, there is already a great degree of common ground between these species.

After five years of study, US scientists determine that the Martians show no signs of advanced intelligence. As it negates any possible Martian humanity through intelligence tests, the US affirms it by requiring these beings to wear clothing, a decision that Nope chalks up to puritanical US ideologies (60). Nope contrasts the five years of meticulous, failed US experimentation with an accidental discovery by his compatriot, Güicho Reyna, who discovered, or rather catalyzed, Martian intelligence. In a story that cements the parallels between the Martians and Mexico's indigenous populations, we learn that Güicho, who was on watch in a remote Centromexican territory, was drinking when a group of Martians attacked him and escaped with his tequila. When the Martians returned, they could speak. Within two hours, US officials arrived and took both the aliens and Güicho into custody, where, after exhaustive tests, they concluded that "un etanol destilado de cactus y oxigenado en los organismos marcianos produce en su metabolismo considerables cambios síquicos" (61).

The fact that the Martians gain language only after coming in contact with a traditional (Centro)Mexican beverage, coupled with the ensuing US invasion of both Centromexican and Martian rights, suggests that the Martians and Centromexicans are connected in their similar plight as colonized subjects. On the one hand, because a Centromexican discovered Martian intelligence, it seems that the the nations of earth should affirm his country's status as an advanced, modern power. Arguably no other nation has left a more significant mark on humanity's understanding of the solar system. On the other hand, it is precisely at this moment of glory that US officials arrive. Not only do they annex all of the results of Güicho's discoveries, but they take him prisoner as well, which is a clear violation of sovereignty that would never occur between equals. Any illusions of grandeur are immediately erased as Centroméjico loses its claim to humanity's greatest astrobiological achievement. The novel seems to suggest that Martians and Centromexicans should join together against their US oppressors, but the Party instead chooses to colonize the newly intelligent Martians within its territory as if liberation will result from this mimetic imperialism.

Centroméjico draws from the example of its own historical colonizer in New Spain as it goes about its imperial project; however, there are several key differences in how the newer empire administers its colonies. For instance, Centroméjico never institutionalizes Spanish in the Martian population.<sup>41</sup> Part of this is due to 22<sup>nd</sup> century technologies that have produced American-made interpreting machines that facilitate communication between speakers of different languages. These devices become a sort of prosthesis or cybernetic organ upon which both interlocutors depend. Joanna Zylińska understands the prosthesis as “an articulation of the slippage between the self and its others” (216). This is certainly the case regarding the interpreters; it is through this apparatus that the Self can communicate with an alien Other. As



they communicate through this object, both the Centromexican conqueror and the conquered Martian subjects become cyborg entities where the fusion of the body with technology allows for a level of unification that would otherwise be impossible.

As this prosthetic mouthpiece literally brings different groups in contact, it invokes certain aspects of Haraway's thought, where cyborg identity brings different types of bodies together (150). What is more, it permits both interlocutors to maintain their own language and, to a certain extent, culture. These devices become a great example of what N. Katherine Hayles sees as a privileging of the flow of information over the body within posthuman societies (2). Information is no longer trapped due to limitations of the body; instead it is transformed as it leaves one speaker and is changed into something that the listener can process. One unintended consequence is that, given their dependence on the prosthesis for communication, the two races do not develop a means of training their own bodies to communicate with one another. This in turn leads to even greater social fragmentation than that of colonial Mexico. In New Spain, for example, although the majority of indigenous subjects never learned Spanish, there were many who did. At the same time, many Spanish bureaucrats learned Náhuatl and other regional indigenous languages to more efficiently administer in these colonies (de Reuse 226). In both cases, people trained their bodies to move and communicate across cultures. On Mars, however, neither colonizer nor colonized learns the Other's language. Ironically, then, the interpreting machines result in Martian bodies being ignored unless the colonizers explicitly engage them.

In many ways, the Centromexican Empire is even more totalitarian than that of its Spanish forefathers; as it controls technology, the Party also controls interracial relations. Systemic exclusion from the language makes it impossible for the Martians to follow Roberto Fernández Retamar's counsel and appropriate their colonizers' language for their own benefit

(30). These aliens then become true subalterns in the tradition of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, for they are literally incapable of speaking.<sup>42</sup> The novel emphasizes Lobelto's subalternity as he and Nope communicate through an interpreter that fails to convey certain types of discourse. Nope reverts to insults and slang, but the machine simply buzzes, reminding the Centromexican that they are not speaking the same language. The *espaciero's* inability to express himself through pejorative language sears his discriminatory thoughts in his mind. At one point he complains saying, "no se imaginan lo terrible que es tratar de ser decente frente a un marciano" (63). Of course, the fact that the Martians have no voice when engaging with earthlings does not mean that they never speak. José Rabasa has argued that "Spivak's question [can the subaltern speak?] is only pertinent when the subaltern is expected to interface with the state" (4). The question becomes moot when colonized people, or Martians in this case, choose to "remain *outside* the state and history" (4 emphasis in original). Obviously, Martian communities continue to interact amongst themselves; the problem is that their discourse is illegible to state officials like Nope. Similar to the indigenous populations of mid-century Mexico, the Martians live on the fringe of society, and the state only engages them if it has a vested interest.

Perhaps the form of Centromexican exploitation of Martians that Nope most celebrates is sexual in nature. Similar to what happened under Spanish colonial rule, sexual relations occur between colonizing Centromexican males and colonized Martian females, but these are moderated from the center of the colonizing nation. This reflects a historical reality where, according to Elizabeth Anne Kuznesof, *mestizo* identity posed serious questions for Spanish society, and steps were taken to curtail the potential of illegitimate *mestizos* (166). The preponderance of mixed-race subjects testifies to the prominent position of indigenous women within the colonies. Because their status as sexual objects could give them access to European

privilege, Kouznesof argues that “race functioned primarily as a discriminator for men, putting non-Spanish women in a privileged position for social mobility” (161). It should come as no surprise that Centromexican explorers pursue sexual relationships with Martian women, thus leaving heterosexual Martian males with few sexual options. Nope alludes to a competitive relationship between Centromexican men and their male Martian counterparts when he exalts brothels as proof that Martian women have adapted to his culture (62). He furthers such ideas when he observes that many Centromexican *espacieros* have Martian wives. Similar to the Spanish case, these relationships produce negative fallout in the homes of Centromexican citizens back on earth. A letter Nope receives from his mother explains it best: “ya me estuvieron platicando todas las vergonzosas enfermedades que pescan con esas horribles viejas que salen de los otros mundos. Si eso es nada natural, fuchi, hasta parecen animales” (27). The novel ultimately shows that such discursive attempts to dehumanize Martian women (and men)—and by extension their interplanetary progeny—are misguided.

The simple fact that earthlings and Martians can have reproductive sex alludes to Martian humanity because, if they are biologically compatible, they must somehow belong to the same species. It is an evolutionary anomaly that species from two different planets would have developed the necessary anatomy to carry out heterosexual reproduction. Of course, even if they did not have sexually compatible bodies, it would remain problematic to deny Martians an equal status to earth-based humanity because both races exhibit high intelligence. Haraway explains it best as she considers humanity’s unexceptional evolutionary condition: “By the late twentieth century in [. . .] scientific culture, the boundary between human and animal is thoroughly breached. [. . .] Language, tool use, social behavior, mental events, nothing really convincingly settles the separation of human and animal” (151-52). That said, Western society continues to

assert a distinction between human and other forms of life. Rodney A. Brooks acknowledges this fact when he observes that Western society confers greater levels of “beingness” to animals depending on “how similar they are to us evolutionarily and physiologically” (154), a fact that ties “beingness” to more developed nervous systems.<sup>43</sup> Throughout his novel, Olvera shows that the Martians have the mental capacity necessary to carry out even the most complex of human tasks, such as piloting spacecraft and using language. If this were the only similarity between the inhabitants of the fourth planet and those of the third, it would be enough to require equal rights.

When we consider both the Martians’ intelligence and their sexual compatibility with earthlings, we can disprove any claims of Martian inhumanity as mere racist constructions. Of course, there are cases in nature where males and females from separate species can procreate; however, these are confined to organisms whose evolutionary lines only recently diverged, and who therefore still have similar DNA (Enríquez and Gullans; Cochran and Harpending 48-54). As such, these exceptions actually prove the rule; inter-species breeding remains possible due to genetic similarities that are so strong that it is difficult to bestow more “beingness”—and hence greater rights—on one of the two progenitors or on the progeny. The fictional case of earthling/Martian reproduction does not result from a recent shared ancestor because these races evolved independently on two separate planets. Evolutionarily speaking, each respective race is more recently related to its planet’s most prehistoric bacteria, plants, and fungi. Given the historical improbability that they would have a shared genetic ancestor—beyond the possibility of a Martian bacteria arriving to earth via asteroid—the most probable explanation for their ability to interbreed stems from a type of convergent evolution that is not only phenotypic, but also genetic.<sup>44</sup> Their corresponding evolutionary histories have both produced genetic humans, and any progeny that comes from interbreeding represents an ironic, literal variation of José

Vasconcelos's "raza cósmica," especially in those cases where thinkers conflated *mestizaje* and the cosmic race. Any denial of rights to Martians, earthlings, or any possible interplanetary progeny is based not on objective, verifiable differences in "beingness," but on social constructions that favor one type of humanity over another.

The Centromexican treatment of the Martians is a thinly-veiled critique of policies—both in Mexico and the world—that deny humanity to the subaltern, and it exemplifies how mimetic imperialism ultimately validates US incursions into the imitating country's territory. It is against this backdrop that the novel so effectively criticizes lettered discourses that hypocritically rail against foreign meddling in the country even as they support internal empire. Nope's discourse reflects the insanity of a political movement that believes it must exploit in order to be truly modern, and, more subversively, it shows that these very projects to secure national modernity actually validate systems of oppression that will never allow the country an equal position alongside imperial powers like the US and the nations of Western Europe. His fictitious account communicates many of the strongest grievances of the student movements of the 1960s. If anything, 1960s Mexico was more oppressive than even Centroméjico's reigning Party; Nope is placed in an insane asylum in large part due to his subversive discourse. His punishment seems incredibly light when compared to the fate that the "dangerous" students suffered at the *Plaza de las tres culturas*. The characterization of a state that mimics its imperializers in a failed attempt to project a vision of modernity proves prophetic when viewed alongside the events that would occur at Tlatelolco later that year.

## Conclusion

Mid-century Mexican SF, particularly that of the 1960s and 1970s, reflects the conditions

of a time in which lettered discourses began to lose their hegemony. The result is a fascinating dialogue between countercultural and officialist thinkers. One interesting finding of this chapter is that *letrado* figures continued to reify official *mestizaje* and modernity well beyond the 1960s; what is more, the rise of *la onda* did not mark the end of lettered discourses as others have previously argued. *La onda* emerged from a larger context in which greater numbers of people could challenge the lettered ideals of the state through literature and activism. In a few infamous cases like Tlatelolco, the state reacted violently against those who challenged its power. More often, however, the PRI engaged in a war of ideas by disseminating official discourses to the masses through film and visual culture. Imperialism—particularly the state’s right to build an internal empire while resisting colonialism from the outside—became especially key to lettered Mexploitation, and anti-lettered texts like *Mejicanos* satirically engaged similar ideas, albeit from a deconstructivist standpoint. The remarkable fact that both lettered and countercultural SF (and horror) recognized an imperial drive inherent to modernity is especially noteworthy; the disagreement between lettered and countercultural discourses came not from the existence of Mexican attempts at empire, but regarding the morality of the practice. The tension between the lettered city and *la onda* almost certainly extended beyond SF, but this genre proved especially adept at negotiating discourses of modernity.

If there is any one common moral denominator between *Mejicanos* and Mexploitation, it is that Mexico has the right to exist autonomously from external imperialism. At times, *lucha libre* film distanced Mexico’s drive for empire from that of the West. At the end of *Santo contra la invasión de los marcianos*, for example, the *luchador*, after having killed the invading Martian forces, destroys their spaceship—and by extension its highly advanced technology—because “la humanidad [. . .] aún no está lista para semejante adelante.” Rather than transform his country

into earth's hegemonic imperial power, the *luchador* opts to rid humanity of this tempting technology of domination. This suggests that lettered discourses justified internal imperialism in large part because they did not view the domestication of the Amerindian as an immoral, colonial or militaristic project, but as an acceptable form of nation-building. *Mejicanos* deconstructs officialist imaginaries as it posits an intimate relationship between internal and external empire by playing out Mexico's colonial ambitions in space. As it challenged the most cherished lettered discourses, *la onda* popularized new ways to consider national identity and politics, and lettered influence began to ebb.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation I have emphasized that state and lettered officials believed that they could transform Amerindians into *mestizos* by fusing their bodies with modern technologies and inculcating them with capitalistic ideologies. These cases of state violence nod towards a separate yet related condition in which people of *mestizo* and *criollo* descent ceded their racial privilege when they adopted values that ran contrary to those of the government. In a very real sense, student activists and union workers ceased to be *mestizos*—or at least official *mestizos*—and instead became a peripheral group whom the state believed it must colonize in order to secure its own modernity.

<sup>2</sup> Díaz Ordaz probably assumed that Western governments would sympathize with his heavy-handed treatment of student demonstrators given that the United States and Western Europe resorted to similar measures that same year. See Jorge Volpi (154-61).

<sup>3</sup> Mexploitation is a term used to denote Mexican exploitation cinema which is known for its low-budgets and weak aesthetics. Many of these movies were dubbed into English and exported to the United States, where to this day they are available as a source of derision (Syder and Tierney 50; Greene 1-3). In this study I use the terms Mexploitation and *luhca libre* cinema interchangeably.

<sup>4</sup> Sánchez Prado characterizes *Mejicanos* as “a very limited book both aesthetically and narratively” (129 nt. 8).

<sup>5</sup> Jorge Ayala Blanco notes that Santo’s movies were the most successful Mexploitation films both domestically and throughout Latin America (296).

<sup>6</sup> *Mejicanos en el espacio* was published on April 2, 1968, six months to the day before



the massacre at Tlatelolco.

<sup>7</sup> Centroméjico's very name, which results from Mexico's absorption of the nations of Central America, belies a historical colonial drive on earth that later plays out in space.

<sup>8</sup> Carlos Monsiváis argues that *lucha libre* is popular because "form does not attempt to betray function [. . .], because the fans in their metamorphosis, become a Roman circus tribunal; because the pretense of the crowd ends up belonging to everyone and no one" ("On Lucha Libre").

<sup>9</sup> Armando Bartra argues that Mexican cultural production often posits El Santo as the vessel through which divinity—either God or the Virgin—defends Mexico (63).

<sup>10</sup> Anna Sunshine Ison discusses the influence of the retired, masked wrestler Superbarrio, who clamored against the PRI on numerous occasions from 1987-2000. For Ison, El Santo's legacy and Superbarrio's politics worked together to create a superhero discourse in both fiction and real life. See Ison (7-8).

<sup>11</sup> Beyond *Mejicanos en el espacio*, other works from *la onda*, particularly José Agustín's *Abolición de la propiedad* (1969), use a science fictionesque narrative to challenge the dogmas of the *mestizo* state.

<sup>12</sup> Although Lomnitz uses the term "internal colonialism," I prefer the term imperialism. Both of these terms suggest an asymmetrical relationship between the indigenous and *mestizo* populations, but by calling this a project of colonialism Lomnitz tends to focus on the state's claim to territory. By referring to imperialism, I hope to expand my unit of analysis to include the cultural dimension as well.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara Fuchs demonstrates how colonized subjects can leverage their greater intelligibility to strengthen their own subject position within the colony through her study of Inca

Garcilaso de la Vega and Guaman Poma (64-98). While the colonized subjects here “inscrib[e] themselves, chameleon-like in Spanish mores and personas” (10), Fuchs stops short of questioning possible desires for empire in their discourse.

<sup>14</sup> Silviano Santiago asserts that the road of *mestizaje* “leads in the opposite direction to that travelled by the colonist” because it attempts to fuse with other races rather than exterminate them (7). However, both *mestizaje* and extermination are ultimately strategies of dominion on a European model. In one case problematic bodies are removed through violence; in the other they are mitigated through racial hybridity. Both strategies tend to favor European culture and ways of knowing.

<sup>15</sup> Certainly, not all cinema buoyed official discourses. Some, like Luis Buñuel’s *Los olvidados* (1950), were severely critical of the post-revolutionary state. In his book, *Buñuel and Mexico: The Crisis of National Cinema*, Ernesto R. Acevedo-Muñoz views Buñuel’s work as a subversion of the nationalistic discourses of the films of the Golden Age, particularly those of Emilio Fernández. His excellent study shows how certain directors were able to produce highly critical films. However, as this chapter shows, *mexicanidad* remained at the heart of the nation’s film tradition, although now it appeared through the lens of science fiction and horror of Mexploitation rather than the melodramas of the Golden Age.

<sup>16</sup> Adán Avalos argues that, while Mexploitation films “were sponsored by the state, they were made according to the new model of film production, and reflected the emergence of the themes that would come to represent ‘naco’ cinema” (189).

<sup>17</sup> Ironically, when the government finally lifted the television ban on *lucha libre*, many pro wrestlers—most of whom had never performed a televised match—voiced their frustration because it greatly changed the spectacle, and thus performance, of the sport. See Levi (200-12).

<sup>18</sup> Álvaro Fernández Reyes notes a gradual liberalization in the wrestler's image as he went from never drinking to rarely drinking (152-54).

<sup>19</sup> Not all people in government viewed *lucha libre* films favorably—Andrew Coe documents the intriguing fact that Luis Echeverría's brother, Rodolfo, tried to block the production of these films (30). According to the *luchador* Mil Máscaras, this was more personal than political; Rodolfo's acting career had been limited to minor roles in Mexploitation-style movies, and he wanted to exact revenge (qtd. in Coe 30).

<sup>20</sup> While he does not mention *Santo vs. la invasion de los marcianos*, José Luis Barrios notes an exaggerated sexuality of alien females within Mexploitation films. For him, "woman is alien: she is Other because she is seductive" (163). This representation also underscores the "cultural relationship between sexuality and power" (163). Barrios's analyses can be extended to monstrosity in general in a genre where women are witches and vampires as well as aliens.

<sup>21</sup> The Martian leader is played by the foreign-born *rudo* Wolf Rusinskis, who was the most famous unmasked wrestler in Mexploitation cinema (Aviña "Ring"). This fact underscores the imperial nature of these alien attackers as they invade earth.

<sup>22</sup> The original Frankenstein may be a product of Mary Shelley's novel of the same name, but the character probably found a place in Mexploitation by way of Hollywood.

<sup>23</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of Vasconcelos's fifth race, see Chapter 1.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of unmasking and castration, see Greene (80).

<sup>25</sup> While masks may hide a suffering wrestler's face, people like Nelson Carro note that "la parte del cuerpo afectada es grotescamente señalada" (16). Thus the excessive suffering still occurs. See also Tiziana Bertaccinni (86).

<sup>26</sup> According to Jorge del Pozo Marx, it was the mask that transformed Rodolfo Guzmán

from an unspectacular, yet solid, wrestler into a legend (199). He goes on to state that the wrestler defended his identity at all costs because of the power that his mask granted (199-200).

<sup>27</sup> Rodolfo Guzmán Huerta would become a literal cyborg in 1981 after suffering a heart attack in the ring and being fitted with a pacemaker (Wilt, “Santo” 219).

<sup>28</sup> We never learn how Frankenstein’s grandson and daughter are related; however, the age discrepancies between them present one of the more obvious situations where narrative details fail to carry across films.

<sup>29</sup> Voodoo and science were both invoked to transform cadavers into zombies not only in Mexploitation, but also in early Hollywood cinema. In both cases, the figure of the zombie alludes to imperial tendencies; as Peter Dendle writes, “whether zombies are created by a vodun master or a mad scientist, the process represents a psychic imperialism; the displacement of one person’s right to experience life, spirit, passion, autonomy, and creativity for another person’s exploitative gain” (48).

<sup>30</sup> See *Santo y Blue Demon contra los monstruos* and *Santo y Blue Demon contra el Doctor Frankenstein* for especially salient examples of European scientists of Mexploitation who use their knowledge to enslave innocent (*mestizo*) Mexicans.

<sup>31</sup> Fernández Delgado sees Santo’s exhortation against the misuse of science as proof that “in Mexican movies, it is hard to detect any hope that something good will ever come from science” (141).

<sup>32</sup> Given that Spain eradicated indigenous writing—which was confined to the Mayans—shortly after their arrival, it would be impossible for an uneducated Amerindian to interpret an ancient text based on a similar racial identity. This scene then, belies a certain level of ignorance in the film’s producers.

<sup>33</sup> Despite its passive role in Santo's film, Syder and Tierney note that the Aztec mummy posed a mystical threat in other Mexploitation films, such as *Las luchadoras contra la momia azteca* and *La momia azteca contra el robot humano* (39-40).

<sup>34</sup> Immediately after filming *La venganza de la momia*, Santo starred in *Las momias de Guanajuato*. The fact that he, along with Blue Demon and Mil Máscaras, battles with these figures further contradicts his discourse in *La venganza de la momia*.

<sup>35</sup> Patricia Cabrera López argues that *Mejicanos en el espacio* is one of two novels that Diógenes published in 1968 that was not overtly leftist (149). If she is correct that in this assertion, then the novel attests to a heterogeneous opposition to the 1960s PRI that stretched across the political spectrum.

<sup>36</sup> In this section of the chapter, I use the term Party to refer to the political entity that controls Centroméjico, while the term PRI refers to the twentieth century Partio Revolucionario Institucional.

<sup>37</sup> Castellanos's texts that most masterfully show the nuance within the social hierarchies of Chiapas are her novel *Balún Canán* (1957) and her collection of short stories *Ciudad Real* (1960). With the exception of the story "Arthur Smith salva su alma," these texts focus on divisions of power based on race, gender, and parentage rather than on transnational relations between *mestizos* and the Western world.

<sup>38</sup> García-García views Nope's plot to fake the appearance of the Virgin on a space rock as "una crítica directa contra el mito religioso mexicano de la aparición de la Virgen de Guadalupe" (72).

<sup>39</sup> By connecting Lobelto to a 22nd century version of the Civil Rights movement, Olvera achieves two things. Firstly, he asserts the existence of Martian—and by extension subaltern—

rights; secondly, he grounds his novel in the student movements of 1968 that, according to Eric Zolov (122), patterned their own civil disobedience after the movements that had occurred a few years earlier in the US. See also Volpi (143-50).

<sup>40</sup> A quick glance at demographic information from the US and Mexico seems to uphold the imaginary of US extermination of its native Americans and of miscegenation in Mexico. According to *The World Factbook*, Mexico is 60% *mestizo* and 30% indigenous, while the United States is approximately 1% Amerindian. However, these numbers can be misleading as well. Because *mestizaje* does not fit into the US racial imaginary, many people who could self-identify as such on the Census either have to say they are “two or more races,” or simply pick one or the other. This artificially lowers the number of people of Native American descent living in the US.

<sup>41</sup> We should distinguish between the institutionalization of language and the forced assimilation of language. There were so many Náhuatl speakers as recently as the 19th century that Mariano Rojas “pleaded the case for Nahuatl language education with Emperor Maximilian and later with Porfirio Díaz” (de Reuse 226). The relationship between indigenous communities and the Spanish-speaking center was so fragmented that the post-revolutionary state divided the nation into regions in its attempts to assimilate the Amerindian population (Lewis 176-95). While many Mexican natives did not—and continue not to—speak Spanish, the colonies were administered in this language. By the seventeenth century, indigenous surnames had almost completely disappeared in favor of those of Spanish origin (Lockhart 127). The colonizers clearly institutionalized Spanish, even if they did not force everyone to learn it.

<sup>42</sup> For Spivak, a person’s ability to produce discourse questions his or her status as subaltern (294-308).

<sup>43</sup> Many scientists and philosophers extend high levels of beingness to intelligent animals that are not evolutionarily similar to human beings as well. This is particularly the case with octopi, a species in which Jennifer Mathers and Roland C. Anderson have asserted high levels of intelligence and even individuation (339-40).

<sup>44</sup> *Science Daily* defines convergence as “the process whereby organisms not closely related (not monophyletic), independently evolve similar traits as a result of having to adapt to similar environments or ecological niches.” An example of this is the development of wings in both birds and bats. Each of these creatures developed these limbs long after their genetic lines diverged from their closest common evolutionary ancestor.

### **Conclusion: The Lettered Vestiges of the Technologized Body Today**

At the end of his book, *Naciones Intelectuales: Las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana (1917-1959)*, Ignacio Sánchez Prado argues that “La fábrica de imaginarios e identidades que se desarrolló durante los años del gobierno de la Revolución, tanto con el fomento del Estado como en la reproducción de sus ideologías en espacios del campo de producción cultural, sigue siendo el punto de partida en los estudios mexicanos actuales” (239). This assertion attests to the fact that the effects of post-revolutionary lettered cultural projects in the country continue to linger in the collective imaginary to this day. As I have argued throughout this dissertation, one of the key components of these lettered projects was the assertion that the state could modernize the indigenous masses by fusing their bodies with technology. It should be of no surprise, then, that the technologized body would continue to interface with national politics and identity in the twenty-first century. My work has suggested that Mexico’s lettered city lasted longer than previously believed, but I ultimately concur with the overwhelming consensus that lettered discourses have effectively disappeared by the early twenty-first century.<sup>1</sup> That said, although the state’s role in producing official discourses has greatly dissipated,<sup>2</sup> the vestiges of twentieth century cultural nationalism continue to inform popular ideas of race and gender in the twenty-first century. As my experience at the *lavandería*—which I narrated at the beginning of this dissertation—shows, many people still view indigeneity as essentialistically primitive. People rarely discuss *mestizaje* openly in contemporary society, yet racial hybridity continues to function as the almost invisible counterpoint to the indigenous. Lettered and state officials may have originally produced nationalistic cultural production with the aim of building and articulating a viable, twentieth



century nation-state, but their work continues to inform ideas of national identity decades after their production.

The residual effects of lettered discourses on Mexican society become especially clear in major urban centers, where the continued presence of officialist art and literature is especially visible. On a normal day, a resident of Mexico City may go to the headquarters of the Secretaría de Educación Pública and view the murals of Diego Rivera. While there, she may decide to take a photograph with the life sized statue of José Vasconcelos standing at the base of the stairs. When she goes to the Parque de Chapultepec, several vendors will try to sell her the masks of El Santo, Blue Demon, Mil Máscaras and many other *luchadores*. If she refuses (or accepts), these same people may offer to sell her a pirated copy of *Santo contra las mujeres vampiro*. As she flips through the channels on her television after returning home, she will almost certainly come across a Golden Age film, perhaps one directed by Emilio Fernández and starring María Félix, Dolores del Río, or Pedro Armendáriz. These examples show that, while lettered thinkers may no longer actively contribute new cultural production to twenty-first century Mexican society, officialist writers and cultural producers of the past continue to shape how present-day Mexicans understand and imagine their national heritage. This continued relevance of lettered discourses means that intellectuals have a duty to continue to discuss twentieth century cultural nationalism in order to better understand and explain contemporary attitudes and conditions within the country.

My dissertation is indebted to the work of scholars like Joshua Lund and Pedro Ángel Palou who have approached post-revolutionary *mestizaje* from a contemporary perspective. These writings have astutely positioned discourses of racial hybridity within post-revolutionary constructs of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Their excellent studies show how literature and cultural production

played a key role in constructing and negotiating a national and racial identity throughout the twentieth century, and they also imply that the effects of *mestizo* normativity continue to ripple throughout the nation to this day. My own focus on the body has uncovered numerous strategies that post-revolutionary *letrados* employed to modernize—and thus discursively assimilate—indigenous actors into the state. Modernity transcended society and became corporeal; racial, cultural, and technological hybridity were different incarnations of an official *mestizaje* whose articulation went far beyond genetic understandings of race. Instead, lettered discourses held that people could modernize their bodies and assimilate to the state through technological hybridity. The post-revolutionary state supported lettered discourses to promote varying articulations of technological hybridity from at least the time of Vasconcelos until the 1970s. Given the prominence of the different champions of state-sanctioned racial doctrines within society, Mexican people continue to be bombarded with lettered discourses of racial and technological hybridity well into the twenty-first century.

The fact that these discourses remain important to constructions of Mexican identity is especially interesting because the country's lettered tradition ultimately fell after the nation adopted neoliberal policies. Beyond further institutionalizing a preference for technocratic political leaders over broadly-educated intellectuals, this political and economic shift prescribed a more hands-off approach from the government regarding literary and cultural production. This was especially the case regarding film, where “the Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público (SHCP) [. . .] surveyed a project of *desincorporación*—that is, of extricating COTSA [Compañía Operadora de Teatros S. A.] and film exhibition from the umbrella of government funding and management” (Sánchez Prado *Screening*). Cinema had provided one of the last refuges for lettered discourses within the country, but the new political climate born out of the 1989

Washington Consensus largely erased the medium as a means of producing official discourse. In recent years there have been many exceptions to this general observation,<sup>4</sup> but the fact remains that the decision to privatize the film industry sounded the death knell of Mexico's lettered tradition. As the government limited its role in sponsoring cultural production, it became difficult for the state to use art for didactic purposes.<sup>5</sup> One consequence of this new environment was that directors were now free to discuss themes ranging far beyond officialist notions of *mexicanidad*. This led to a cinematic renaissance of sorts where films like Alejandro González Iñárritu's *Amores perros* (2000), Alfonso Arau's *Como agua para chocolate* (1992), and Guillermo del Toro's *Cronos* (1993) were received with great acclaim in the international arena (Sánchez Prado *Screening*). Each of these movies certainly engaged questions of national identity, but they now did so free from the control of the state. In many ways the post-NAFTA film industry became a site for criticizing—rather than buoying—official discourses.

The end of lettered discourses in Mexico has certainly not coincided with a similar disappearance of cyborg entities from discourses of modernity. Within Mexican literary and cultural production—and even society at large—the technologized body continues to reflect racial privilege and even imperialism, both internal and external. The concept has certainly developed in interesting ways since the adoption of neoliberal politics and the coinciding fall of the lettered tradition in the 1980s. This is particularly obvious from the vantage point of literary and cultural studies, where the majority of authors and artists have used cyborg imageries to undermine discourses of foreign imperialism and domestic corruption. That said, the lettered representations of the early twentieth century continue to inform the biopolitics that determine which bodies have access to modern technologies and which ones do not. Ironically, one of the most enduring elements of post-revolutionary racial projects has been that those indigenous

people who fail to assimilate to the state remain largely on the periphery of society. This underscores a serious failure on the part of the post-revolutionary state, whose primary goal had been the (admittedly forced) assimilation of indigenous peoples into the state through technology.

The continued technological marginalization of the nation's Amerindians became particularly obvious in 2013, when several embarrassing episodes illustrated the level to which indigenous Mexicans remained barred from access to modern medicine. On October 2, 2013 Irma López Aurelio, a nine-month pregnant indigenous woman from Oaxaca, arrived at Hospital de Jalapa de Díaz and requested emergency medical assistance. After doctors refused to attend to her, she gave birth on her own in a grassy patio on the public clinic's grounds ("Falta de atención"; "Investigarán"). What was truly remarkable about this case was, unfortunately, not its singularity—in June, 2014 the reporter Pedro Matías revealed that at least thirteen indigenous women had been forced to give birth under similar circumstances in Oaxaca alone<sup>6</sup>—but the fact that Eloy Pacheco López, a nearby witness, photographed the ordeal and posted the images to his Facebook page. The picture captures López Aurelio squatting over the grass as her newborn child, still connected to her body through the umbilical cord, lies on the ground. This powerful image went viral almost immediately, and bloggers and activists the world over decried the negligence that had allowed such an event to happen ("Mexicana"). By October 4, the story had appeared in newspapers throughout the shocked country. As pressure mounted, the Oaxacan Secretary of Health, Germán Tenorio Vasconcelos, extended an official apology to the new mother through his personal blog ("Comunicado de prensa"). Afterwards, the official announced that he would investigate the hospital's director, Adrián René Cruz Cabrera ("Falta de atención"; "Investigarán").

As this story demonstrates, access to medical technology remains highly racialized throughout Mexico. Many officials conjectured that López Aurelio had been unable to communicate with the hospital staff due to linguistic barriers (“Investigarán”), a fact that suggests that her experience came about because she had not assimilated to the dominant (*mestizo*) culture. Given that state actors continue to conflate Western cultural and racial identity with technological, scientific, and medical privilege, the perpetually poor condition of indigenous healthcare becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Just as the mid-century practice of racializing vices like alcoholism had negative effects within the indigenous populations, contemporary views of indigenous technological bareness facilitate episodes like that endured by López Aurelio. This harrowing event exposes certain failures of the post-revolutionary state both in ameliorating indigenous poverty and in extending quality healthcare to the rural sector. Far from serving all people equally, public (not to mention private) hospitals continue to favor people who are fluent in Spanish. Part of this is due to practicality; it is difficult to find medics who are fluent in languages like Náhuatl and Zapoteco. At the same time, it underscores the fact that *mestizo* identity continues to afford some people greater privilege than others. That said, because constructions of race in Mexico remain relatively fluid, an indigenous person can assimilate to the *mestizo* state by adopting the performative traits of the majority. However, those people who do not assimilate to the state (for whatever reason) suffer at times serious consequences.

In direct contrast to the 1940s, where Lamarckian paradigms led state officials to believe that medicine could alter the national genome, more contemporary views see medicine as a physical change to the body and nothing more. Of course, while medicine no longer carries the genetic—and eugenic—ramifications that it did during the mid-century (at least in a Lamarckian

sense),<sup>7</sup> access to medical care still reflects a person's ties to cultural *mestizaje*. In many ways, then, lettered discourses of mid-century rural health and hygiene continue to shape national policies into the present. The fact that people like López Aurelio cannot receive the assistance that they need—a problem that rural health initiatives aimed to overcome almost eighty years ago—suggests that certain societal discourses continue to view indigenous Mexicans as *Homo Sacer* subjects whose *zoê* does not merit doctors' time. The hospital's refusal to assist the indigenous mother signaled her as medically and technologically bare, yet it was ironically her image, captured and posted across ultra-modern social media, that ultimately denaturalized her relegation to the periphery. Several more women would later give birth under similar conditions (Rodríguez), but now hospital workers knew they could be held accountable if this occurred under their watch.

This event can help us compare and contrast the nature of the technologically hybrid body of post-revolutionary cultural nationalism to that of the early twenty-first century. Lettered officials aimed to produce a new nation-state by imagining a modernized, national body from the top down; as such, they took great pains to imagine and articulate appropriate types of technological and racial hybridity. Cyborg identity was not a site of resistance, but a strategy for amending the post-revolutionary biopolitics in a way that could incorporate the indigenous population into the nation-state. The end goal, then, was to grow economically and achieve Western-style modernity. Amerindian culture sat at the heart of these practices, but the state ignored the input of the very indigenes whom they aimed to assimilate. In López Aurelio's case, the photograph was uploaded to testify against the failings of a public institution. Thus the photo's very existence shows that technology, beyond a tool for top-down domination, can also play a role in resistant, grassroots activism. In contrast to past decades, the state can no longer

simply ignore its indigenous citizens by asserting their supposedly tenuous ties to modernity. Indeed, because these actors use technology in sophisticated ways to voice their grievances with those in power, Amerindians can assert their own role in a modern yet indigenous society. Unlike the post-revolutionary period, where technological hybridity played a conservative, homogenizing role in the national imaginary, the tension—and even slippage—between technological bareness and hybridity produces a problematic, resistant entity in neoliberal society.

I call this new version of the cyborg a *Robo Sacer*, which is a cyborg articulation of Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer*. This condition occurs both within the indigenous and *mestizo* populations of the country, but its incarnations vary greatly from case to case. Similar to Agamben's theorization, the *Robo Sacer* is a human being who is dehumanized as a result of a state of exception—in this case the transnational movement of capital, labor, and technology. What is perhaps most interesting about *Robo Sacer* people is not that they face dehumanization when interacting with foreign technologies, but that they can use the very technologies that oppress them to denaturalize their own relegation to the periphery.<sup>8</sup> The most pressing question about *Robo Sacer* resistance is whether or not marginalized people can truly foment systemic change through a subversive use of the technologies that assign them their role in society. Interestingly, many of the country's most accomplished writers and cultural producers have engaged the concept of *Robo Sacer* at some level.<sup>9</sup> As such, some of the most useful material for gauging the effectiveness of *Robo Sacer* resistance comes from the country's literature, theatre, and film. Given this fact, *Robo Sacer* identity and resistance is a topic that I plan to further theorize by looking at the works of people like Sabina Berman, Carmen Boullosa, Guillermo Gómez Peña, Francisco Laresgoiti, Alejandro Ricaño, Alex Rivera, and Guillermo del Toro.

Each of these artists provides interesting clues about the potentials and limits of *Robo Sacer* resistance. Certainly, these are not the only Mexican (or Chicano) cultural producers whose work could be viewed within the framework of *Robo Sacer*. However, given their prominence in intellectual and creative circles, these people have played an especially important role in negotiating the country's colonial status through technology.

Ever since at least the lettered projects of the post-revolutionary period, the juxtaposition of the body with technology has played an integral role in negotiating questions of race and modernity. Whether a eugenically evolved *mestizo*, a medically enhanced technological hybrid, one of its various articulations in *onda* literature and Mexploitation cinema, or a post-NAFTA articulation of *Robo Sacer* identity, the fusion of the body with technology disrupts and reconstructs the reigning paradigms of race, gender, and even nation. Studies on cyborg and posthuman articulations of Mexican identity, then, become especially pertinent as they show the problematic relationship between technology and racial and gender privilege. As we look at the discursive role that the cyborg body plays in modernity-driven contexts like post-revolutionary Mexico, it becomes clear that scientific discourse exists as a Foucauldian technology of power whose interpretation and implementation necessarily interfaces with the established hierarchies of racial and gender privilege. Because the unproblematic acceptance of politicized understandings of science and technology will almost always favor one segment of society over another, studies like mine have a strong activist dimension. Rather than accept officialist explanations that attempt to withhold privilege from different sectors of society by invoking science, this dissertation challenges us to critically examine such discourses' aura of infallibility. This will subvert supposedly self-evident ideas that justify asymmetrical structures of power, promoting social justice in their stead.



Because official post-revolutionary discourses favored mixed-race identity over indigenous, Afro-Mexican, and even Anglo-Saxon/European cultures, they interpreted science and the technologized body in ways that buoyed discourses of racial hybridity. When they appeared in lettered discourses, representations of the posthuman demonized external imperialists—be they Europeans, North Americans, Australians, or the aliens of Mexploitation—while they exalted the hegemony and sovereignty of (*mestizo*) Mexico. State and lettered officials rarely imagined the Amerindian populations as enemies, but they did view these communities as a hindrance to national progress. As such, lettered thinkers confronted the “threats” of indigeneity through paternalistic works that generally essentialized native cultures and knowing. For this reason, representations of the posthuman tended to justify *mestizo* interventions in indigenous communities and justified elitist attempts to address the “Indian Problem” without seeking to dialogue with the very people they aimed to uplift through racial and technological hybridization (Mignolo 102). Because official discourses held that the inevitable conversion of Mexico’s native population into *mestizos* was the key element of national progress, lettered thinkers imbued their posthuman creations with Messianic qualities. Nevertheless, the domineering suppositions of official *mestizaje*—whose implementation in society would relegate indigenous peoples and cultures to the periphery—lurked beneath the surface of this apparent benignity.

It is for this reason that, while I recognize Donna Haraway’s argument that cyborg identity can greatly amend the performative identities of the body, I stop short of espousing the assertion that technologized bodies eliminate constructions of race and gender. Instead, the lettered posthuman figures that I have considered in this dissertation frequently reinforce notions of race and gender even as they articulate these aspects of corporeal identity in ways that go

against previously held, pre-revolutionary notions of performativity. Rather than usher in a utopian (post)humanity that exists free from the biases of contemporary humanity, it seems more precise to argue that technological hybridity provided a new means for imagining and organizing economies and societies around the national (*mestizo*) body. It is for this reason that a study of the posthuman in post-revolutionary Mexico elucidates the modernity-driven projects of racial miscegenation that lasted through the 1970s and into the 1980s. Representations of technologically hybrid bodies played a key discursive role in the thought of many of the lettered figures of the time period. This suggests that posthumanism, far from representing a fringe discipline in Mexican studies, should take up greater prominence. The converse is also true; as posthuman theory helps explain certain aspects of post-revolutionary cultural nationalism, the singularities of the Mexican context signal new ways of thinking about posthuman theory.

One of the most salient findings of this project is that lettered representations of posthuman bodies interfaced with the reigning paradigms of race, gender, and nation, yet they were hardly liberatory from a social justice point of view. On the one hand, this observation undercuts much of the optimism that many early theorists like Haraway attributed to cyborg identity. On the other hand, the observation that the simple act of amending performative aspects of the body is not necessarily liberatory seems self-evident. Once again, we see a major distinction between lettered and contemporary cyborgs. Whereas the *Robo Sacer* attempts to break free from rigid interpellations of the body by denaturalizing the socially constructed nature of global discourses of race, capital, and power, the lettered representations of cyborg and posthuman entities ultimately aimed to inscribe “appropriate,” “modern” performativities of the body upon the population. In both cases, the creators of these discourses view their work as liberatory, but both articulations of the cyborg can harbor an oppressive underbelly, although this

may not be intentional. It is important to note that lettered figures tended to see themselves as champions—not oppressors—of the masses. People like Emilio “El Indio” Fernández, for example, dreamed of a world free from *caciques* who took advantage of and abused the nation’s Amerindians. However, as he imagined a *mestizo* utopia, he necessarily silenced indigenous voices, and his discourse became a new oppressor of indigenous identity. Similar observations hold true regarding José Vasconcelos, El Santo, and the muralists.

Discourses of technological and racial hybridity appeared across a wide array of political ideologies, but in each case they produced a problematic understanding of indigenous Mexico. My dissertation has distanced itself from an array of other studies that have viewed official *mestizaje* and *mestizo* modernity as generally rightist discourses, with dissenting voices coming from the left.<sup>10</sup> Instead, it has shown that the conflation of racial hybridity with modernity reached across the ideological lines of post-revolutionary thought. Figures like José Vasconcelos, Manuel Gamio, Emilio “El Indio” Fernández, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros certainly did not share the same political persuasions—indeed, even rightists like Vasconcelos and Gamio held at times irreconcilable worldviews. Yet all of them engaged the technologically hybrid body at some level, ascribing it a utopian, even spiritual value that would usher in indigenous and hence *mestizo* redemption. Despite—or perhaps because of—this optimism, lettered figures often favored programs of internal empire. This led to a palpable ambivalence as the very people who championed *indigenista* projects were the most vocal opponents of foreign incursions in Mexican territory. No example of lettered cultural production surpasses the hypocrisy inherent to official *mestizaje*’s ambivalent imperial projects of the films of El Santo, whose work represented one of the last incarnations of Mexico’s lettered tradition.<sup>11</sup>

The fact that Mexican artists and directors created a homegrown, posthuman, *mestizo*

superhero who could defend his country against both indigenous and imperial threats is especially interesting as we consider how posthuman identities constructed and reflected mid-century thought. The notion of colonial mimicry rings especially clearly in Chapter 3, but it is a key, underlying theme in Chapters 1 and 2 as well. Vasconcelos and Fernández were highly critical of US attempts to intervene within their country's borders even as they attempted to incorporate indigenous Mexico through coerced assimilation. Given this fact, one could argue that, beyond their competing representations of the posthuman, post-revolutionary Mexican *letrados* also frequently employed morally ambivalent discourses of colonial mimicry. This finding, while perhaps unsurprising, underscores the fact that cyborg and posthuman identities can be at times enslaving constructions of power. In the end, lettered attempts to mark indigenous and female bodies with technology reflected a desire to de-Indianize the people and transform them literally—both genetically and culturally—into *mestizo* subjects. This constant held true across a wide array of discourses from numerous thinkers.

In no place was the desire to incorporate the indigenous masses more visible than in the muralist movement, which largely set the tone for the expressions of cultural nationalism that would come afterward. Certainly, the main protagonists of the movement were hardly monolithic. Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros all ascribed to some form of Marxist thought,<sup>12</sup> but they differed from one another ideologically in many ways.<sup>13</sup> Not surprisingly, each muralist afforded indigenous Mexico a slightly different role within the modern, *mestizo* state. Rivera espoused—and largely constructed—post-revolutionary ideals of *indigenismo*. In his works, Amerindian peasants and proletarians took power by seizing control of the technologies of production within their country. For his part, Orozco gave greater credence to discourses of *hispanismo* that largely justified the conquering, European side of

*mestizo* identity (Rochfort 46; Swarthout 75-76). In his murals at Hospicio Cabañas, for example, mechanical Spaniards conquered and tamed the “backwards” inhabitants of America as they fathered *mestizo* cultures and bodies. The muralists were not the only people that used the visual arts to construct and critique the national body politics; artists like Frida Kahlo challenged gendered discourses of power through self-portraits that employed imageries of technological hybridity and female ties to nature to question rigid distinctions between male and female. Muralism may have set the standard for didactic, official discourses, but geography ultimately confined its ability to reach people living beyond the urban center. It was for this reason that the state invested in film as another mouthpiece of pro-*mestizo* ideals.

Of course, not all lettered thinkers agreed with the official projects of the post-revolutionary state. Indeed, most *letrados* probably dissented from official viewpoints from time to time, and their opinions later showed up in their artistic production. For example, Dolores Tierney reminds us that much of “El Indio’s” cinema undermines officialst notions of Mexican national identity (*Emilio Fernández* 2-3). Tierney provides a space for more nuanced treatments of state-sponsored examples of cultural nationalism, but the most spectacular lettered breaches with post-revolutionary ideologies occurred in the national literature. As Sánchez Prado argues, the written word represented “un espacio de mayor contención y conflicto, donde los debates sobre la naturaleza misma de ‘lo nacional’ y la forma que esta naturaleza debería tomar en la cultura permitieron el desarrollo de posiciones más diversas que otras manifestaciones culturales” (*Naciones* 16). Certainly, as my dissertation has shown, post-revolutionary official discourses were hardly monolithic, but Sánchez Prado is correct in asserting a special place for dissent in post-revolutionary literature. Given this fact, it should come as no surprise that early twentieth century science fiction novels engaged utopian notions of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*

much more critically than their counterparts of visual culture. Where most representations of cultural nationalism viewed the technologized body as a tool for modernization, the country's science fiction authors saw terrifying eugenic projects that, if carried out to their logical conclusion, could have disastrous results.

This is particularly visible in the work of the authors Eduardo Urzáiz and Rafael Bernal, both of whom held positions of influence in the post-revolutionary government. Not surprisingly, their novels intersected with the post-revolutionary ideologies of their time. Urzáiz, a Cuban-born Yucatecan medic, practiced medicine during a time in which the reigning paradigms of eugenics had politicized his profession. He imagined the effects of this movement in his dystopian novel *Eugenia* (1919), which takes place in a twenty-second century Mexico that has used authoritarian measures to impose a eugenic society on the country. Bernal—a diplomat who was probably best-known for his detective fiction in novels like *El complot mongol* (1969)—wrote the intriguing novel *Su nombre era muerte* (1947) in which a culturally *mestizo* man exiles himself to an indigenous community. In this company, he develops tools—particularly indigenous flutes—that allow him to communicate with mosquitoes. Throughout the novel, the protagonist asserts several connections between these insects and indigenous peoples and cultures. The dynamics of the novel are such that it clearly criticizes *indigenista* projects, even as it essentializes indigenous communities and ways of knowing. These (and other) science fiction texts from the early and mid-century post-revolutionary periods probably had little or no bearing on official policies, but they provide an interesting angle from which to view how lettered figures imagined the relationship between modernity, race, and the body.

The modernizing effect of technology on the body was a uniting element in the thought of post-revolutionary (*mestizo* and *criollo*) thinkers from all over the political spectrum.

Certainly, each *letrado* imagined the technologized body in ways that reverberated with his or her own personal ideologies, yet they ultimately produced (personalized) versions of a technologically hybrid *mestizaje* and modernity. Perhaps the most surprising fact about these impressively coherent representations of posthuman imageries in post-revolutionary Mexico is the obvious fact that none of the *letrados* of this study was privy to Haraway's theorizations. Indeed, none—with the possible exception of El Santo and his producers—had ever even heard of cybernetic organisms because the scientific community was yet to coin the term. Nevertheless, these thinkers' work clearly shows how the juxtaposition of technology with the body can reconstitute how society interpellates racial and gender identities onto individuals. Viewed in this light, my dissertation contributes to current debates of posthumanism and Latin American Studies by inviting investigators to consider the effects of technological hybridity in societies that predate the earliest academic theorizations of cyborg identity.

Most studies of Latin American cyborg identity focus on literary and cultural production from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Brown *Cyborgs*; Hoeg 95-107). As I noted in Chapter 2, Jerry Hoeg imagines a *cybermestiza* that resists rigid interpellations of the body and thus undermines traditional notions of performativity (99). J. Andrew Brown's book *Cyborgs in Latin America* theorizes the (specifically) South American cyborg body as a site for negotiating both the traumas inherent to post-dictatorial society and the continued oppression of the neoliberal order. Both studies of the posthuman differ from mine in that they consider literature and cultural production from throughout post-neoliberal Latin America. Given that their focus on the cyborg deals almost entirely with recent literature, their theorizations fit more neatly within the framework of the *Robo Sacer* that I theorized earlier in this chapter than with the lettered trope for nation-building that I have discussed throughout the balance of this project.

Certainly, there are differences as well; neither scholar explicitly views the cyborg within a biopolitical framework. That said, the resistant nature of technological hybridity remains at the core of their work. In the end, these studies deal less with notions of race construction and more with the cyborg body's ability to resist and undermine traditional structures of power. The focus on a region rather than a single nation-state facilitates both critics' attempts to broadly theorize the role of cyborg identity in constructing twenty-first century human being in Latin America. My own focus on Mexico compliments these earlier studies as it allows us to imagine the role of the cyborg body across race and time in constructing racial and gender identities in a single country.

My focus on Mexico has allowed me to flesh out similarities in the thought of people whose work seems antithetical at first glance. It would have been difficult to show that the discursive significance of the technologized body reverberated across the thought of figures from all over the political spectrum if I had not focused on a single country. Nevertheless, because Mexico is only one of many Latin American nation-states that underwent social upheaval in the twentieth century, this focus also by necessity ignores how discourses of technological hybridity may have played out in other parts of the region. Latin America's turbulent twentieth century included a revolution in Cuba, decades of terrorism and violence in Colombia and Perú, and military dictatorships in the Southern Cone, Central America, and the Caribbean. Given this shared trauma and the need for national reconciliation, a focus on lettered representations of the technologized body may also shed light on the nature of twentieth century nationhood and modernity throughout Latin America. The post-revolutionary government aimed to incorporate indigenous bodies into the *mestizo* state to ameliorate class and race-based grievances. The similarities between these countries and Mexico suggest that other Latin American countries may



have also used the technologized body for nation-building. My theorizations may even extend beyond Latin America and illuminate conditions in other “Third World” countries that have faced the dilemma of embracing Westernized modernity or maintaining their cultural heritage. It would be interesting to see what insights a study on race formation and cyborg identity may provide within other national contexts. Mexico is not alone in negotiating such difficult concepts as modernity, race, and equality. This very fact suggests that Mexico was probably not alone in promulgating discourses of technological hybridity to construct a viable nation-state.

While these suggestions for further research signal fascinating avenues of study for future projects, the primary focus of the present dissertation has been on how lettered officials within Mexico used the technologized body as a tool for nation-building. This study has shown that, as scientific and technological discourses interact with and are inscribed upon the body, their union creates new structures of performativity that affect the day-to-day lives of those who live within a given society. When lettered officials employed posthuman discourse in their work, they suggested new strategies for modernization. Within the Mexican context, notions of modernity became inextricably tied to official *mestizaje*, which in turn evoked both eugenics and technological hybridity. This dissertation’s focus on scientific discourse as a technology of power sheds light on the ways in which discourses of domination can be presented as supposedly unbiased, self-evident “truths.” Although the articulation and the ramifications of the technologized body change depending on the context, this entity almost always signals the possibility of domination or liberation. The solution, of course, is not to become anti-scientific; instead it is to critically gauge all forms of knowledge, especially those that project an aura of self-evident infallibility. As the Mexican case indicates, technology and science are not oppressive of their own accord; they only take on a domineering nature when those in power

articulate them in ways that marginalize indigenous peoples.

In the coming years, Mexican society will face new challenges as innovations in the sciences, technology, and medicine change the way that people—both within the country and beyond—lead their lives. As these new technologies are inscribed upon the national body, they will necessarily interact with and amend the country's identitary discourses as they interface with the reigning biopolitics. Viewed alongside this reality, it becomes especially necessary that more people consider the ways in which science constructs agency within Mexico (and beyond). Science and technology, for better and for worse, are forever enshrined in contemporary society. Authors, artists, playwrights, and film directors will continue to imagine—at times deliberately, and at others unconsciously—how the juxtaposition of the body with technology informs human being in their historical moment. The future may remain to be written, but as this study shows, one thing is certain: the technologically hybrid body will, in its myriad forms, continue to provide avenues from which to (re)consider notions of race, gender, and national citizenship in Mexico.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Duncan Wood notes a disturbing relationship that has emerged between the television station *Televisa* and the ruling PRI in recent years. Particularly, he notes that, when he was a presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto “signed a multi-million dollar deal” with the company, and he later married Angélica Rivera, one of the network’s telenovela actresses (98). This led many people to question the media’s neutrality during the election season (Wood 98). Because *Televisa*’s relationship was with the PRI, which was an opposition party at the time, it represents a slightly different phenomenon from the state-sponsored art discussed in my previous chapters. Nevertheless, it attests to continued attempts by politicians to use popular culture to their advantage.

<sup>2</sup> After the privatization of the film industry, federal and state agencies often fund individual productions. Even in these cases, however, directors have greater freedom to critique state institutions and policies. Luis Estrada’s *El infierno*, for example, received government money, yet satirized the pomp associated with the bicentary with a scathing rebuke of the country’s handling of the drug war. See Sánchez Prado (*Screening*).

<sup>3</sup> Lund’s *The Mestizo State* looks at how artists and intellectuals have associated *mestizo* identity with modernity ever since achieving independence.

<sup>4</sup> Although direct government intervention in the film industry is less common than it used to be, the state continues to meddle in the affairs of directors and producers from time to time. Recent documents have shown, for example, that the government paid Sony Pictures for the right to make certain revisions to the script for the upcoming James Bond movie, *Spectre* (2015). Obviously, these changes were intended to improve the country’s image. See Joshua

Partlow (“Mexico Wanted”).

<sup>5</sup> The fact that the post-NAFTA film industry received less government intervention than its forbears did not convert it into a suddenly progressive force. Sánchez Prado notes that economic factors—particularly the need to cater to the middle class—has led to the production of films that “manifest regressive political positions and problematic representations of race, class, and gender” (*Screening*). While no longer dictated from the top, then, Mexican cinema continues to largely produce films that communicate traditional values.

<sup>6</sup> Journalists have cited many cases in places ranging from Puebla (Jiménez) to León (“Hospital de Huajapan”) where indigenous women gave birth on hospital grounds.

<sup>7</sup> Although Lamarckian genetics no longer inform Mexican medical practices, one could argue that the fact that numerous indigenous women have been forced to give birth in unsanitary conditions alludes to a degree of eugenics discourse that persists in Mexican society. Certainly, this is not a case of active, ethnic cleansing, but the passivity of many public hospitals when dealing with indigenous mothers indicates a level of ambivalence regarding the reproductive health of Amerindian women in Mexico.

<sup>8</sup> The *zapatista* movement is probably Mexico’s most well-known example of *Robo Sacer* activism. *Zapatismo* became a *Robo Sacer* movement as its proponents started using technology—which had historically played a key role in subjugating indigenous Mexicans—to denaturalize transnational discourses that favored neoliberal, white supremacist ideologies and ignored indigenous concerns. The fact that the oppressed can undermine dehumanizing discourses by recurring to the very technologies that relegate them to the periphery is a potentiality that merits much greater research. Indeed, due to the inherently resistant nature of the *Robo Sacer* subject, it is possible that research in this area may transcend the so-called Ivory

Tower and find “real world” applications in the areas of human rights and social justice.

<sup>9</sup> *Robo Sacer* discourse occurs across a wide range of media. Recent novels include Gerardo Ramírez Serrano’s *Último Edén* (2010) and Norma Yasmille Cuéllar’s *Historias del séptimo sello* (2010). Two especially interesting filmic examples of this discourse are Ángel M. Huerta’s *Seres Génesis* (2010) and Joaquín Rodríguez’s upcoming film, *Xibalbá* (2015). Unfortunately, both movies have had financial difficulties that make them difficult to acquire. Nevertheless, both also speak to the continued tradition of posthuman, *Robo Sacer* ideas in twenty-first century Mexico. There have also been interesting examples from the national theatre that engage the posthuman. For example, see Pedro Valencia’s *Con Z de zombie* (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Although Lund does not explicitly make the distinction between right and left-wing politics in *The Mestizo State*, the people that he alludes to as champions of (official) *mestizaje*—figures like Porfirio Díaz, José Vasconcelos, and even Benito Juárez—can be seen as generally rightist figures, while those who critique the tenets of official *mestizaje*, particularly Rosario Castellanos and Elena Garro, are generally affiliated with the left. As such, the division, while not explicitly enunciated, is clearly present in his study.

<sup>11</sup> Carlos Olvera deliberately toys with the ambiguities and ambivalence of colonial mimicry to an even greater degree than do the films of *El Santo*. However, because he was a countercultural writer of *la onda*, his novel never aimed to justify programs of domination.

<sup>12</sup> MacKinley Helm questions those who view Orozco as a moralizing communist (68). Indeed, he argues that, when the painter joined the leftist Siqueiros Syndicate, he did so “not as a Communist but as a painter who wanted to get a job” (71).

<sup>13</sup> The muralists’ mutual affition for Marxist doctrines did not make them political allies; they often disagreed bitterly one with another. For example, Rivera was an unapologetic

Trotskyite, while Siqueiros sided with Stalin after Lenin's death. After Trotsky fled the Soviet Union, he found hospice in Rivera's home; however, Siquieros took orders from Stalin and at one point orchestrated a failed assassination attempt on the former Soviet leader (Fulton 69-71).

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